

*Albert B. Ramsdell,
Salisbury Mass.*



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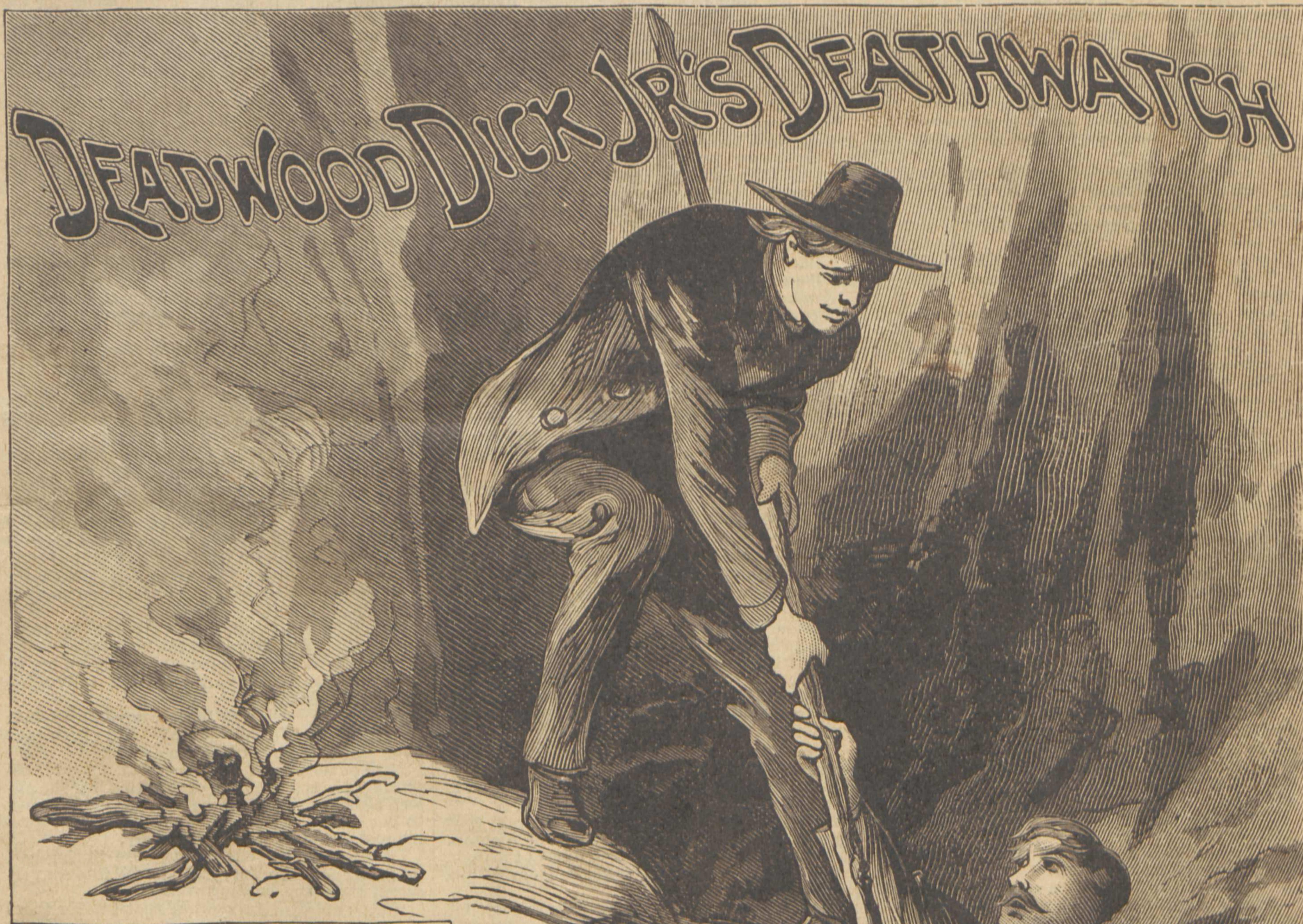
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OR,

The Moving Mystery at Mexican Mustang.

BY ED. L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE IRON DAGGER AGAIN.

To use the suggestive Westernism, Mexican Mustang "sat up and howled."

And when Mexican Mustang set up a howl in earnest, it was a howl to be heard, and one that generally meant business.

Mexican Mustang was a wild camp, away back from the main trails of civilization, and one which, in most matters, was a law unto itself.



WITH AMAZING STRENGTH THE QUAKER SLOWLY DREW THE PRISONER FROM
THE DISMAL DEPTHS.

It was a camp of some two hundred denizens, and was a lively one at night, as your Western mining-camp generally is. In the daytime, usually, it was a sleepy place.

The life of the camp was the "Big Bee," Mine, managed by Lenus Dempstrey, a man who managed a good deal of the rest of the business of the camp as well. He was owner of the "Imperial Palace" Hotel, and, some said, of the "Coffin Nails" Saloon, also.

The Imperial Palace, the only hotel of the camp, laid some claims to elegance and importance. It was a two-story frame, with lean-to wings, but in front looked like one massive square structure, owing to the false face it presented to the street. From the rear, as some one said of it, it looked like a coop behind a billboard.

Forbidding as the name was, the Coffin Nails was the most popular resort in the camp. It was a saloon of the usual type, unless in point of size—for it covered almost as much ground as the Imperial Palace, and had the usual attractions. It dispensed "coffin nails" at two "bits" per nail; had its gaming tables for the slaves of Queen Fortune; and furnished music free for those who cared to dance. And dancing was by no means unknown.

A "stag" party at the Coffin Nails had just broken up, between midnight and one o'clock, and the crowd was pouring out into the public Square when a startling discovery was made.

It was a moonlight night. The Square was almost as light as day; and when Spring-heel Stephen uttered his exclamation of surprise the crowd was not long in learning what was the matter, for a glance where Stephen pointed was enough.

There, in the middle of the Square, with face upturned to the shining moon, lay the body of a man, and in his breast was an iron dagger!

"Ther iron dagger ergain!" cried Spring-heel Stephen, pointing. "Thar et ar', galoots, an' thar's all what's left of Pemberton Punk."

Then it was that Mexican Mustang began its howl.

One morning, about a fortnight previous, a similar discovery had been made, the victim being one of the camp's citizens, the same as on this occasion.

In the public Square, almost in the same spot where this second victim lay, a dead man had been found, with an iron dagger of rude and peculiar make buried in his breast.

The victim on that occasion was a fellow named Hank Philps, a rather inoffensive sort of man, and the affair was one of greatest mystery. Who had killed him, and why had he been killed? Who had fashioned so rude a weapon as the iron dagger? Questions which no one could answer.

No one had ever seen such a weapon before, no one could guess who had made it, and the whole affair was a nine-days' wonder. Philps had no enemy that anybody had ever heard of, but was rather a congenial chap and one who was liked, though he was far short of being a public hero. There was nothing great about him; on the other hand he was a most prosaic individual.

And now this Pemberton Punk was another of similar sort. He was—or rather had been—a sleepy, matter-of-fact and easy-going fellow, one who had been considered harmless and whom no one would have harmed. Why had he been killed?

When the general howl had subsided, Spring-heel remarked:

"Galoots, this hyar thing is gittin' too numerous, seems ter me."

"Right you be," shouted a voice in the crowd.

"Yas, a good deal too numerous, I should say," Spring-heel repeated. "What is goin' ter be done about it?"

"We wants ter find ther man what done et, that's what! These hyar iron daggers is suthin' new 'round hyar, an' we wants ter find ther chap what makes 'em. When we git him, then we'll have holt o' ther tail eend of ther mystery."

"Right ye be!" responded Spring-heel; "but, whar is ther man what kin go ter work an' sift them 'ar facts out? I tell you, galoots, this hyar is gittin' ter be a serious thing, an' no knowin' whose turn it will be next. I don't want any of et in mine, fer one."

All this before any one laid a hand upon the body of the dead.

Spring-heel Stephen, as he was called, was mayor of the camp. His peculiar name had been given him as fitting his fondness for dancing.

This had been his birthday, and the dance at the Coffin Nails had been in his honor. Most of the crowd were more or less full of the "terri-

ble," but all were sober enough to realize the seriousness of the situation.

The mayor now stooped and drew out the dagger, looking at it critically.

"Ther same as t'other," he observed, handing it to the man nearest him. "An' et hev done its work, too."

"What ar' goin' ter be did about et?"

"That's ther question; what ar' goin' ter be done?"

"Somethin' have got ter be did, that's sure. Thar was Philps, an' now hyar's Punk; an' no tellin' who'll be ther next. I tell yer et hev got ter be looked into, an' no foolin' about it, nuther."

"How long hev he been dead?" asked one man.

"Not long," answered Spring-heel, "fer ther body ain't cold."

"Then et stands ter reason that ther murderer can't be fur away. Let's begin a search for him."

"We'll search, in course we will; but, it hits me that it won't be of a big heap o' use. Ther galoot what done this business don't mean ter be ketched, an' it ain't likely he will be, not in a hurry."

"He must be run down in ther science way, then. He must be somewhar around hyar, an' we must play ther detective on him."

"Haw, haw!" laughed Spring-heel, "a fine lot of detectives we'd make, now wouldn't we? Thar ain't a galoot of us what could detect a chicken thief if we caught him in ther act."

"We kin play at it, anyhow."

"Yas, we kin play at it, Trim Travers, that's so; an' seein' that you are ther one ter speak of, suppose you jest tell us how?"

"Oh, I'm not sayin' that I kin do that; I don't p'tend ter any special smartness; but it seems ter me that these hyar daggers is ther p'int ter make ther start from."

"Ther's sense in that."

"But, how is we goin' ter make a start, when we don't know whar to begin?"

Remarked one man:

"Thar ain't but one man hyar kin make sech things, as I knows of."

"An' who ar' he?" demanded the mayor.

"Ther smith at ther mine."

"Rats! Yer wouldn't 'cuse Ben Hopson of et, would yer?"

"Not a tall, Spring-heel, not a tall; but he ar' a smith, an' he hev charge of ther only forge we knows of. Mebbe he could give us a p'inter."

"Waal, whar is Ben, then?"

"Is Ben Hopson in ther crowd, or has anybody seen him?"

So called out the man Trim Travers.

"No; he ain't in ther crowd, ye might be sure," somebody responded. "He's too goody-goody ter mingle wi' us, yer knows."

Ben Hopson, the man in question, was a strong temperance advocate, and had never set foot across the sill of the Coffin Nails. He was blacksmith at the mine, and while a thoroughly good sort of fellow, had no particular "pard" in the camp.

"Then let's have him out hyar," proposed the man who had first brought his name to notice. "We'll find him ter home, no doubt."

"Come on, then."

Excited as the crowd was, and most of them none too sober, it needed no second invitation to start them.

Trim Travers led the way, and ere long they were at a cabin in the neighborhood of the mine buildings and Travers was pounding at the door.

"Hello!" soon came the response from within.

"Hello! what's wanted?"

"Git yerself out hyar an' see," one rough fellow shouted. "We wants you, that's what."

"All right, all right; I'll be with yer; jest hold on till I kin git on me boots, an' I'll be ther."

He put on his boots, and he put on something more—his belt and weapons, for the loud manner of the crowd spoke of danger in the air.

Presently he opened the door and came forth, a revolver in hand.

"What is it, friends?" he inquired.

"You is wanted out on ther Square," answered Trim Travers.

"Who wants me?"

"Spring-heel Stephen."

"All right; I am with you; but don't forget that I am fixed, in case you mean me any harm."

The blacksmith had suddenly dropped his broad twang, though none noticed it, and with revolver still in hand he went with the crowd back to the Square.

There, in the bright moonlight, awaited the other half of the crowd, with the mayor at their

head. The body of the dead man was at his feet, and it took only a glance for Ben Hopson to understand.

"Another!" he exclaimed.

"Yas, another, Ben Hopson," answered Spring-heel; "an' we wants ter know what you knows about this hyar business."

"What I know about it?"

"Prezactly! Cast yer eye at this hyar dagger, will yer."

The dagger was forced upon him, and he looked at it carefully, remarking:

"Just like the other."

"An' that's jest ther p'int," Trim Travers spoke up. "Somebody made these things, Ben Hopson, an' you ar' ther only blacksmith in ther camp. That's only one forge, as yer knows."

"That's true enough; but if you think I made them I want to set you right at once, here and now. I did not make them, and do not know anything about them. Surely you can not suspect that I am the murderer, can you?"

"That wasn't ther p'int," Trim rejoined; "we want ther facts about who made 'em; we kin look after ther rest—"

Something happened to interrupt, though for a second no one knew just what. The next moment made it only too clear. There was a thud, a groan, and each looked at the others for the explanation; then Ben Hopson was noticed reeling, and as they looked at him he fell at their feet, flat on his back, and in his breast, buried to the hilt, was another of the terrible iron daggers!

CHAPTER II.

RECOLLECTION OF THE DEATHWATCH.

FOR some seconds no one moved or spoke. This third tragedy was so overpowering that every man in the crowd was rendered about helpless.

Then, suddenly, with one accord, a great shout went up—a general howl that put all the previous howling to the blush.

"Who threwed that 'ar thing?" demanded Spring-heel Stephen, as now, with revolver in his grasp, he glared around furiously, as though prepared to shoot any man upon whom his suspicion might fall.

And the crowd echoed the cry, as everybody looked for some one to accuse of having done the dire deed.

"We must find him!" cried the mayor, excitedly. "Scatter out, men, an' don't let ther cuss escape ye nohow!"

The crowd scattered speedily enough, a good many of them to seek a place of shelter from another possible dagger in quest of a victim.

"I want ter know if Mexican Mustang ar' goin' ter stand any sech work as this hyar?" called out Trim Travers. "I want ter know if we is goin' ter put up with any sech doin's?"

There was a groan from the fallen blacksmith.

"Ben ain't dead, he ain't!" cried one man, as he stooped by his side.

"Pick him right up, then, an' carry him inter ther Coffin Nails," directed Spring-heel.

"An' do what ye kin fer him, while we try to diskiver ther p'izin varmint what sallyvated him," another added.

So Ben Hopson was borne by willing hands into the Coffin Nails, where he would never have gone willingly and of his own accord.

Most of the crowd had scattered, as said, ostensibly for the purpose of hunting for the unseen assassin, though many took the opportunity to get safely out of the way. Only a few remained at the scene of the tragedy.

Of these, the leading spirits were Spring-heel Stephen and Trim Travers, who fell into conversation about the exciting events.

"Yas; an' hyar's somethin' that I never thort of till this minute," the mayor observed. "Don't ye recollect what pore Punk told us t'other day?"

"Yer means about ther deathwatch?" cried Travers.

"Exactly; you've hit it. Don't ye recollect how he said he'd heard it tickin' at his cabin only ther night afore?"

"That's so. Wonder ef ther was anything in et?"

"Et ruther looks so, don't et?"

"You is right; et do look that way. Hyar ar' pore Punk, stiff as ary defunct ye ever seen."

Trim Travers was mopping a sudden burst of perspiration from his brow, and his face had grown pale.

In the strong moonlight, everything was plainly to be seen, and the others noticing this, Spring-heel demanded:

"Hello! what's ther matter wi' you, Trim?"

"Ther deathwatch," was the gasped response.

"What yer say? Ther deathwatch?"

"Yas; I hadn't thort of et."

"Waal, what about et?"

"I hev heerd et, too—only last night!"

"You? How comes yer didn't say nothin' about et?"

"Never thort of et, as I said. I never paid no tention to any sech stuff, as yer well knows."

"But this hyar brings et to mind, hey? Waal, I don't wonder, seein' how et ar'. But, mebby thar ain't nothin' in et. Ef we could only know whether Hopson heerd et or not, we could judge."

"I don't know nothin' about Hopson, an' don't keer; Punk heerd et, an' I hev heerd et, too; an' ef it meant death ter Punk, mebby et means ther same ter me. I'm goin' ter git home, an' that ter oncen, you bet! Thar ain't no coward 'bout—"

That frightful thud again, and Trim Travers staggered back, clawing at his breast, where one of the terrible iron daggers was buried.

The others now thoroughly horrified, fell back. Travers staggered for a moment, uttered some inarticulate words, and then dropped to the ground, falling across the body of the first victim of the night.

With a cry of horror, at this awful repetition of the tragedy of the iron dagger, the others turned and ran for the open door of the saloon, where they entered with all haste, pale as death and fairly trembling in their "stogy" boots.

And no wonder.

The last man of them closed the door with a bang, and there they stood, like a flock of frightened sheep.

The proprietor of the Coffin Nails had been on the point of putting out his lights when Ben Hopson was brought in, and had listened with keen attention to the report of what had taken place on the Square.

Now, at this sudden invasion, he hastened to demand:

"What ther'tarnel ar' et now, boyees? Any more victims of ther hidden 'sassin?"

"Travers hev got it," answered the trembling mayor.

"What! Not Trim Travers?"

"Deader'n a nail."

"Gosh! What is this hyar camp a-comin' to?"

"Looks like et ar' comin' to a end, mighty soon, ef this hyar work goes on," Spring-heel responded.

"But, et mustn't go on! Couldn't none of ye see ther galoot what throwed ther daggers? Couldn't ye sight him? He must 'a' been at short range, ter fling 'em wi' sech force."

"Ther fu'st thing ter be done," the mayor decided, "is ter close in them 'ar shutters. No knowin' what minnit another of ther pesky things will come flyin' at us, an' I ain't ready ter pass in my chips yet, you bet."

Men sprung to every window, and the shutters were speedily closed.

This gave more of a sense of security, and Spring-heel Stephen dropped upon a chair, taking off his hat and slapping it down on the floor beside him.

"Hang me fer a sick kitten," he muttered, "ef I ain't about weakened. I never felt so queer in my knees afore in me life. Yer all knows that I ain't no coward, but I'll be darn ef this hyar business hasn't taken ther starch out of my collar."

"Reckons we're all in ther same boat," spoke up another.

"Did yer ever see ther likes of it?"

"We never did."

"How's Ben comin' on?"

"We think he ain't hit fatal," responded one of those at the table on which the wounded blacksmith lay. "We think he'll come-to party soon."

"Thank goodness fer that, anyhow! We had no business ter call him out, fer we might 'a' known he had nothin' ter do wi' ther mystery, a good feller like him. Hope he'll pull through."

Others were entering the saloon each moment, by ones and twos, and all with faces pale.

Returning to the Square, the finding of another body thrilled them with horror, and they made a burst for the saloon with all speed.

The proprietor of the saloon was one Dan Burns, a well-liked man, and one who usually had a voice in affairs of public interest. He took it upon himself to have a say in this matter.

"But, Spring-heel," he now interrogated, "how do ye explain this thing? What do ye make out of et?"

"Dern et, Dan, I don't 'splain et a tall," the mayor answered. "Et stumps me, an' that's ther fact. What ter make out of et I don't know. I wish somebody would step up an' solve the problem for us."

"Couldn't none of ye see ther galoot what throwed ther daggers?" the proprietor asked repeating his question of a few moments before. "He must 'a' been at short range, as I said. Didn't yer spot him, light as et ar'?"

"Nary a spot."

"That's mighty queer, anyhow."

"Dan Burns, et ar' more than queer, that's what et ar'. Quick as that ar' dagger hit pore Travers, I looked around, an' not a single spicuous feller was ter be seen nowhere; an' I knew ther feller what throwed it couldn't miss my eye as quick as that; et don't stand ter reason."

"That's so. But, didn't nobody else see nothin' of him?"

Every man who had been present at the time, answered to the same effect.

"Then et ar' a puzzler, an' no mistook," the proprietor concluded. "Et looks as if it might be ther work of the Old One himself."

"How's ther blacksmith?" the mayor questioned.

"We think he's comin' to," answered one who was working with him.

"Pour some likker down his neck, an' see ef that won't help him some. It is good sometimes."

"Yas; but yer knows Ben ar' strict temperance—"

"That be blowed! He ain't votin' on ther question this hyar time. A little pizen is good in extreme cases, so give him some."

"We don't reckon he'd thank us, but ef you says so, why—"

"Haven't I said so already? Give him a dose of et, clear stuff."

A little brandy, in such an emergency, often does good. In spite of Mr. Hopson's stand on the temperance question, he had to take the medicine.

Soon after the brandy had been administered the wounded man came to and opened his eyes.

At first it was plain that he was trying to bring to mind what had happened, and trying to grasp the situation to determine where he was. He looked at the crowd around him in a wondering way.

Spring-heel now arose and pressed forward to the table on which the man lay. At sight of him, the full recollection of what had taken place came to the wounded blacksmith, and he made an effort to sit up, exclaiming:

"It was the deathwatch!"

CHAPTER III.

THE DEATHWATCH IS HEARD.

IT WAS PAST ONE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING.

There was no thought of rest at the Coffin Nails, where, a little time before, a tired company had broken up to retire for the night.

Spring-heel Stephen's birthday had ended with a series of most remarkable happenings—incidents of a terrible and tragic nature. The camp was "howling" with a vengeance, and with something to howl about.

All who were awake in the camp had by this time returned to the saloon, and the crowd pressed around the table on which lay the wounded blacksmith, eager to hear what he might have to say. And his first words produced a decided sensation.

Nearly all heard, and all knew to what he referred, for all were acquainted with what the unfortunate Pemberton Punk had experienced.

"Then you heerd that 'ar, too, did yer?" queried Spring-heel.

Gentle hands had forced the wounded man back upon the table, where a folded coat served as a pillow.

"Yer had better keep quiet, Ben, so's not ter start ther bleed ter runnin', fer ef et does et may go hard with yer," urged one at his side.

"Yes; I heard the deathwatch," the blacksmith made answer, in low tone. "At any rate I suppose I did. I heard a mysterious ticking before I went to sleep to-night, and couldn't make out what it was or where it was. It made me as nervous as an old woman, too."

"And yer couldn't locate et?"

"No."

"Did yer look fer et?"

"Yes; but when I looked in one place it sounded in another."

"Jest it," cried Mayor Stephen. "That's jest what Funk said of et. I tells yer, boyees, hyar's a mystery what is goin' ter stump us, ef we don't look out. I don't know what ter make of et."

"Et won't stump me," one man in the crowd declared. "As soon's et ar' daylight, hyar's what's goin' ter strike out fer pastures new, an' don't ye forget it. I don't mean ter risk my life

by hanging 'round a camp where sech mysterious assassin work ar' goin' on."

"An' right hyar's what's with yer," spoke up another.

"Yas; an' hyar, too."

"Et ar' lucky we ain't all of ther same mind," sneered the mayor, "or our camp might become deserted at daybreak. I fer one mean ter remain right hyar, an' see this thing through. Thar's a explanation back of all this bloody business, an' I want ter know what et means. But, Ben, did yer see who et was that throwed that dagger at ye?"

"No; I didn't see anything. Only felt it when it struck. It came with the force of a bullet, I should say."

"Et ar' mighty odd."

"Do you think I'm going to mend?" the wounded man asked.

"We thinks yer will," encouraged the man who had taken the lead in attending to his wound. "I guess et didn't touch any of yer vital machinery, Ben."

"I'm glad of that. I want to get over this, to lend what help I can in hunting down the wretch who is doing this wholesale murder. There is an explanation to come some time."

"Then yer thinks et was a human that done et?"

"Of course. I am no believer in supernatural agencies, you know."

"We thought mebby ther Old Boy had somethin' ter do with et," one man spoke up. "Et ain't clear ter me that he didn't, nuther."

"You may rely on it that it was a human hand that struck the blows. But I must be taken home to my cabin. You know that I never visit the saloons, and I see you have carried me into one. I hate the smell of the liquor—almost imagine I can taste it."

This raised a laugh. No wonder he imagined the taste of it.

"Yer taste ain't no imagination," informed Spring-heel. "Yer has taken some of ther ardent. Et was given ter ye to bring ye out of yer faint. As to yer goin' to yer cabin, I reckon ye won't go afore daylight."

"How is that?"

"Wnal, I don't opine that any of us is hankerin' after one of these hyer daggers, an' ef we goes out thar's no tellin' who might git one of 'em."

"And so you will stay here, eh? Well, make me a softer bed, if you can, and I'll be more comfortable. I believe with you, that this wound of mine is not going to be a fatal one. I feel stronger. As to the liquor—I was not responsible."

Another laugh, at that, little as the crowd felt like laughing.

While a more comfortable bunk was being prepared, some one suggested going out and taking care of the bodies of the dead; but no one would volunteer for the duty, and even the one who had proposed it was not willing to carry out his suggestion.

There was danger in the air, and these citizens of Mexican Mustang, now thoroughly sober to a man, courted none of it.

But, the excitement of that night was not yet at an end.

When Ben Hopson had been laid on a bed in one corner of the saloon, and had been made as easy as possible, the crowd gathered around Spring-heel Stephen to discuss the situation.

The mayor was sitting by a table, with the four iron daggers laid out before him, and was scrutinizing them intently, when Dan Burns stepped up and demanded:

"Waal, what do you make out of et, Spring-heel?"

The mayor looked up at the crowd around him, and fixed his eyes upon the proprietor. He had not spoken for some minutes, and even though spoken to, had not made any response till now.

"Some things hev forced themselves home ter my mind, Dan," he declared.

"What be they?"

"Yer see these hyar four daggers. Did yer ever see four things more alike?"

"Don't know as I ever did."

"An' did yer ever see things made half as homely as these things be? They has only one merit—they're sharp."

"They is sartainly ugly-lookin' weapons. But, what has that to do with what ye hev figgered out? It don't take much study ter git that p'int down."

"Mebby not; but, right hyar's a finer: Ain't et yer first impression that these hyar things was made by somebody who was only a botch of a blacksmith? Mebby a feller that never tried his hand at et afore?"

"Anybody could see that, too. A blacksmith could do a better job if he was blind staggerin' drunk."

"Sure. Now, that thar is jest ther p'int what I'm comin at. I hev made up my mind that these things was made by somebody that wasn't no slouch of a smithy, and I'll prove et to yer."

"I'd like ter have ye do et."

The crowd pressed around, eager to see and hear, and the room was silent.

"Waal," the mayor resumed, "hyar's ther argymint of ther case: These things is made o' iron, common iron, sech as a greeny might use, not knowin' how ter use steel, or how ter harden iron; but, take notice that all of 'em is ther same size, an' as like as peas in a pod. Could a greeny hev done that?"

"That's so, by ther great!"

"An' then ther drawin' of 'em to a p'int as fine an' sharp as this, with only a hammer, fer ye see no file hev tetched em, was no fool trick, ter say nothin' of ther fact that et was all done in jest ther same fashion on all of 'em. Now, who is ther man what made 'em? We is sartain et wasn't Ben Hopson, after what's happened ter him. Feller galoots, this hyar camp is a-howlin' fer vengeance, an' vengeance ar' what we must have."

The crowd assented to that.

"But hyar we set," the mayor almost thundered, and speaking with such sudden force that every man near him jumped; "hyar we set, I say, like ary passel o' cowards, an' thar ain't a galoot among us what dares poke his nose outside of ther door thar. If thar is, I'd like ter see him, that's all. We're a passel o' cowards, that's what I says. An' who is goin' ter blame us? Et ar' sartain that none of us is anxious ter git one o' these iron jiggers inter our kerkiss, an' we has seen jest all we wants to of 'em this night."

Spring-heel had owned to the truth, and had spoken for the whole crowd as well as for himself. Not a man of them would have crossed that Square, then, for a fortune.

As the mayor ceased speaking, there arose a noise, a small, most peculiar noise. It came from the direction of one of the windows, seemingly, and was peculiarly like the beating of the insect known as the deathwatch, though perhaps louder.

"Ther deathwatch!" cried Spring-heel, bounding to his feet.

Not a man in the room but became visibly pale, as every eye was fixed in the direction whence the sound came.

"Who is it callin' this time, d'y'e s'pose?" questioned Dan Burns.

"I don't know who it's callin'," answered the mayor, snappily, "but I knows what's goin' ter call it, an' hyar goes!"

He had snatched a revolver from his belt as he spoke, and a couple of shots rung out in quick succession, crashing through the window in about the place where the sound was located.

The smoke cleared, the shattered pane was visible, and, when the ringing in their ears had died away sufficiently to enable them to listen for it, the crowd found that the sound had been stilled.

Had the bullets stilled it?

In a moment more, while they still listened, the sound was heard again, and this time seemingly right overhead, on the flat roof of the big saloon. They looked at one another, in something of superstitious awe, and it was only too plain that they were now a thoroughly scared lot of men. Spring-heel had not the courage to fire again.

CHAPTER IV.

COMPLICATED COMPLICATION.

Not a man of them had the courage to propose going out and surrounding the building, though that thought was in the mind of more than one.

If a trick, by that means they might be able to discover what it was and how it was being played upon them. If nothing could be seen, then they would have to turn their attention to the supernatural for the explanation.

In fact, no one had nerve enough to propose anything while the sound continued as described, and it did continue for a full minute.

Then it stopped, suddenly, and was heard no more, though they listened for another minute before any one spoke.

The first man to break the stillness was Dan Burns, and he proposed that they "take something."

Never was a call obeyed with greater alacrity. It was the right thing at the right time, as every man of them felt, and it broke the awful silence that had been oppressing them.

Spring-heel Stephen did credit to his name, and sprung to the bar with great alacrity.

"That's jest what we needs, Dan, somethin' fer our narves. Mine is erbout all onstrung, an' I ain't 'shamed ter own it. Come up, fel-lers!" he urged.

But the "fellers" were already up, or coming.

Scarcely a man of them but braced up his courage at the bar, adding spirits to spirits as it were, and all fell to discussing the situation anew, but gaining nothing in the direction of solving the mystery.

Gradually they settled down, here and there, and finally most of them were asleep more or less soundly.

Daylight found all sound asleep, nor did they awaken until a great pounding at the door brought them to their feet in a bewildered way.

Some of the more virtuous citizens, who had followed the adage, "early to bed and early to rise," and who had known nothing of the events of the night, had discovered the dead men on the Square.

Naturally horrified, they had set up a shout, and began pounding on the doors in the vicinity to get out the late sleepers.

What was their surprise, when the doors of the Coffin Nails opened, to find a good half of the population of the camp pouring out, frowsy, bear-eyed and sleepy in appearance and in fact.

"What's all ther 'tarne' row hyar?" demanded Mayor Stephen, among the first to appear.

"Jest look thar, an' yer will soon see," was the response, and a man pointed at the two bodies in the middle of the Square.

"Humph!" grunted the mayor, "we knew all about that while you was asleep up to yer neck. Ef yer had been out, as we was, you'd'a' known it sooner."

Then followed explanations.

Before the sun was an hour high the whole camp was out on the Square, and intense was the interest and deep the mystery.

As yet the bodies had not been touched, but the story had been told over and over again as often as new arrivals made it necessary, until at last everybody had been made acquainted with the facts.

It was a story that seemed in some respects incredible.

That a knife could have been thrown with force enough to kill a man in the middle of the Square, a man in a group of others, without the thrower's being detected, looked both unreasonable and impossible.

And then, too, the deathwatch rappings—how was it to be explained?

It was not explained, nor did it seem probable that it ever would be. There were the facts; what was to be made of them?

All were agreed that the mystery must be solved, and the assassin discovered and punished; but how were these things to be accomplished?

There was a general sentiment of complaint among those who had witnessed the horrors of the night, that the matter had not been pushed more vigorously at the time of the assassination. Then a thorough search should have been made for the rascal; then he should have been discovered. Passing that, then the deathwatch heard at the saloon should have been investigated at once, even at the risk of life. That should never have been left unexplained.

Such talk as this put Spring-heel Stephen on his mettle.

"See hyar," he cried, addressing the man who expressed himself that way, "you wasn't out hyar, was ye?"

"No," was the answer. "If I had been—"

"Jest so. Ef yer had been, yer would 'a' done jest what we done, an' mebby wuss. We didn't hanker fer any more iron daggers, an' so didn't run ther risk of 'em. You wouldn't nuther; so shut up about et!"

A new arrival appeared upon the scene, just at this juncture.

This personage was Lenus Dempstrey, the mine manager and boss of things in general about the camp.

Some mention of this individual has been made, and of his importance in the place. He was a dark, sullen-looking man, very rough and abrupt in speech and manner.

"What in everlasting is going on here?" he demanded, when he came out on the square from his room in the hotel.

"Ther iron dagger ergain," he was answered. "What?" he cried; "some more of that Hank Philips business? Who is it this time?"

But, as he had crowded to the front while speaking, a sight of the two dead men answered the question. He was evidently amazed and greatly excited.

"This thing has got to be brought to a head, and that at once," he stormed. "We don't want any more of this sort of work. No telling whose turn it will be next, at this rate."

Dempstrey ordered the bodies taken up and put out of sight, a thing no one seemed to have thought of; and returned to the hotel.

The dead were carried away from the Square, and were made ready for burial, and a little later were laid out to rest in the young cemetery a few rods out of the camp, where the body of the first victim of the iron dagger reposed.

The funeral over, the crowd returned to the Square, to the hotel and the saloon.

Spring-heel Stephen was at the Coffin Nails, declaiming to the usual crowd about what he had made up his mind to do toward solving the mystery.

Lenus Dempstrey, seated at a table in conversation with a man some years his junior, gave attention now and then to what the mayor was saying, but did not seem to approve.

Spring-heel was not as sober as he might have been.

"Yas; that's what I'm goin' ter do," he repeated, after making what he considered a good point; "I'm goin' ter have a band o' watchers out ter-night, an' ef anything out of ther reg'lar is noticed anywhar, they will alarm ther camp an' lead us to ther spot. We'll sleep on our arms, ez et war. An' Bruiser Bob is ther man what has vollyteered ter take charge of ther business."

"Yas; I'm what's ready fer ther biz," spoke up a great, overgrown fellow, a regular bullwhacker sort of ruffian.

"And maybe you'll be the next victim," hinted the mine manager.

"Not ef I know et, boss. Anyhow, I'm in fer ther thing, an' Bruiser Bob is not ther man ter back out, you bet!"

"An' we'll make et a p'int ter watch well ther cabin of ther blacksmith," the mayor ran on. "Hopson hev been warned an' also called, but ther call didn't quite fetch him, an' if ther Movin' Mystery means biz et will go fer him ergain. Then will be ther chance fer you ter git in yer fine work, Robert."

"An' yer kin bet I will, ef ther boyees stands to my back when ther pinch comes; that is ter say, if ther Mystery ar' anything what's ter be seen wi' ther naked eye. Ef it's spook—Waal, I don't promise ter be proof ergaint spooks."

This Bruiser Bob was one of the toughest citizens of the camp—perhaps the toughest. He was considered a bad man all around, and his fighting prowess and proclivity had won for him the name he answered to.

About at the middle of the party of the previous night, in honor of the mayor's birthday, as told, Mr. Bruiser was laid by on the shelf, he having imbibed too many of the liquid "coffin-nails" to be of further use to himself or anybody else; and had slept soundly through all the excitement that followed.

He now took up the football of their common braggadocio, and told what he intended doing if it was his lot to get his terrible eye upon the mysterious assassin during his night of watching.

"We'll see how much of that he will remember, if he does see anything out of the common," spoke Dempstrey, smiling at his companion.

"You're right; he'll be as badly frightened as any of them were last night. But, it is strange about that deathwatch business, when you think of it."

"Isn't it strange about the iron daggers? Seems to me it is. But, our talk at present is not of either, but of something more important. What about the matter between us?"

"It is all right, so far."

"And the young woman will be here to-day?"

"By the stage, undoubtedly."

"Very well; we must be ready for her, and make good our points."

"It does not seem possible that we can fail. Wainwright is being taken care of, and if necessity calls for it, can be put out of the way effectively for good and all. It remains for us to do the rest."

"Exactly. You are no longer Sanborn Barrat, but John Wainwright; and you are not exactly John Wainwright, either, since through a complication of circumstances you have had to take an assumed name, even Sanborn Barrat. Ha! ha! Talk of complications! If this isn't one I'd like to know it!"

"You are right, my dear Dempstrey. But, what new excitement is going on outside there? Is it any further work of the iron dagger? Let's see, for something out of the common is in the wind."

CHAPTER V.

BRUISER BOB'S LITTLE JOKE.

DEMPSTREY and his companion rose, and followed the others out.

When they came to the door, an unusual sight, for a mining-camp, met their astonished gaze.

There in the middle of the Square stood a quaint old vehicle, drawn by a big, mouse-colored mule, and on the box of the old trap sat a darky in brass buttons.

The vehicle was something of a cross between a brett and cabriolet; that is to say, it was a modification of both in one. It was long, like the brett, with the calash top, with a seat behind for two; but it was intended for only one horse, and the box seat was for only one.

On the seat behind sat a remarkable couple.

That they were Quakers was told at a glance, by their garb.

The man was a sleek-looking personage, with smooth face, and might have been any age from thirty to fifty.

He was buttoned in a long coat, about the color of the mule, and wore a very wide, stiff-brimmed hat, and old-fashioned bow spectacles rested on his nose.

Looking around at the buildings and the people, innocently curious, he was twirling his thumbs one over the other, this way and that way, as he sat with his fingers locked across his stomach.

The woman, like the man, was sleek-looking, and her age was anything between twenty and forty—Quakers look youthful even when old; and she was clad in the same sober colors. On her head was the peculiar bonnet with its short, gathered cape, and she, too, wore spectacles.

No one spoke for some moments, and the Quaker continued looking about till the crowd had collected close around the vehicle.

Bruiser Bob was the first to break the silence to speak aloud when, suddenly, a panel in the side of the old vehicle dropped down, disclosing some words neatly painted in print.

"Gee-whiz!" he exclaimed, "look 'e thar!"

He pointed at the words on the side of the old trap, which were these:

"OLD QUAKER KORN KNOCKER."

Every eye took in the sign at once, for it had appeared on both sides of the vehicle, and as they looked the Quaker unclasped his fingers and straightened up.

"Good friends," he spoke, "wilt thou tell me the name of thy town?"

"Mexican Mustang," was the response from twenty at once.

"That is a strange name, verily a strange name," the Quaker commented. "How ever came it by a name so odd, friends?"

"Et war like this," volunteered Spring-heel Stephen: "Yer see, this hyar spot ar' one what was rediskivered when ther present residents took possession of it. Thar was some cabins hyar, but not a livin' soul, nothin' but one poor old mustang, lame an' blind: an' not knowin' what name et had ever had, what did they do but call et Mexican Mustang."

"Ay, verily. I see, friend, I see. That was very good, and not so bad a name either, when it is considered. But, friends, what's in a name? Nothing! If thou hast a corn, or bunion, no name can save thee from the pangs of pain, none," and he stooped and picked up something at his feet.

It was a small object, and one instantly recognized as a box of salve.

"No name can save the pang of a corn or bunion," he repeated, as he held the box up to view, "no name save that of the Old Quaker Korn Knocker! This wonderful salve, good friends, will do for thee all that its name implies. It will knock thy corns into insensibility, and spare thee the pangs of suffering."

"A corn doctor, by trixey!" exclaimed Lenus Dempstrey, speaking to his companion.

"Yes; and must have got off his regular route, I should say," the younger man responded. "This beats all I ever saw in a Western camp."

"Don't crowd too close around the mule," the quaker warned. "Wilbur Fox Hicks is a peculiar mule, friends—a Quaker from the tip of his nose to the end of his tail, and he likes plenty of room. Not that he would hurt thee, but accidents will happen sometimes, as thou dost know, especially when there is a mule in the case. See that thou keepeth thy mule well in hand, Pompey Sunbrown."

"Yes, sah," responded the darky in charge, proving that he was the person addressed.

"Yes, good friends," the Quaker went on, holding up his box and warming to his subject,

"if thee has a corn, this wonderful salve will relieve thee of it in short order. I call it a wonderful salve. Wonderful it is. Only a dollar a box, and full directions given with each box, free of charge. Step right up and buy, and thy corn will fly, knocked sky-high, in the wink of an eye! Only a dollar a box, friends, and plenty more where this comes from. Now, who will be the first?"

The Quaker spoke as solemnly as though he were delivering a funeral oration, with never a smile on his face.

The woman sat with folded hands, looking meekly about her.

"Hyar! I want one o' them 'ar!"

So sung out a voice from the rear of the crowd on the left.

The Quaker looked that way and saw a hand up.

It was that of a fellow known as Limpy Sime, a laborer in the mine. He had a corn for almost every toe on both feet.

"Ah! there, friend!" exclaimed the Quaker, "step right up to the front and fork over thy dollar and take the prize. Thee has corns; this will knock them. Give it a fair trial, following the directions, and if thee has a corn left after three days I will refund thy money. Isn't that fair? Come and buy, give it a try, don't be shy, thee knows why. This wonderful salve will give relief when nothing else will. Ha! here thee is; take it, and may it do thee wonders of good."

"Ef et will cure Limpy Sime, et ar' a whooper, you bet!" observed Bruiser Bob, who held a place right close to the vehicle.

"It will cure him, friend, as sure as the sun," the Quaker averred. "And it will cure thee, too. It will cure most of the ills that flesh is heir to. Come right up and try, and then thee will buy, the price isn't high, and once to apply, thee will never say die, but off thee will fly, its merits to cry, and none can deny that it's the best article of the kind on the market to-day!"

The crowd laughed at his oddity of sounding the merits of his wonderful corn knocker in rhyme.

"Who be you, anyhow?"

So asked Spring-heel, while Limpy Sime was examining the box.

"Who am I, friend?" the Quaker repeated. "I am ever ready to answer that, no matter who may ask. To thee I will say, and truly, that I am Bartholomew Pinch, the sole and only proprietor of Old Quaker Korn Knocker. I hail from the city of Brotherly Love, where my large establishment is too well known to need mention. This lady, gentlemen of Mexican Mustang, is my dear wife, Charity Pinch, my partner in this life and in the life to come, and the treasurer of my cash. Ah! thank you, sir."

This to Limpy, who passed up his dollar and retained the box.

"But ef et don't do jest what you say," Limpy gave notice, "I'm comin' fer my dollar back ergain."

"And thee shall have it," was the promise. "Here, Charity," turning to his life partner, tendering the money to her; "here is another dollar for thy purse. And now who will have the next. Don't all speak at once, but one at a time, and the wonderful salve is yours at a dollar a box. Has thee a headache? Try the Knocker! Has thee a sore throat? Try the Knocker! Has thee a swelled head? Try the Knocker! It will knock anything, and a hundred knocks in every box, warranted. Who next? A wink of the eye, a word or a sigh, a shout or a cry, I'll hear or espy; and the knocker is thine at the price."

"Is it good fer roomytiz?" inquired one man.

"I was about to mention that," was the quick response. "For that ailment it has no equal. Put it on the place, and thee will want to jump a five-foot fence on the day following. My friend, try it. No cure, no pay. If thee is not well in three days, thy money is on call. I tell thee it's so, and this truth thee shall know, this salve is not slow, and thy diseases must go; or if they don't, then thy dollars are on tap. Quick sales and all profits is my motto, friends. Sold again and got the money; and now who is next?"

"Say, mister, how is et on snake-bites?" asked Bruiser Bob, with a wink at some of his kind who stood near.

"Thee has hit it again, friend," the Quaker promptly cried.

"Will et cure 'em?"

"Ay, verily; every time. Has thee a bite anywhere?"

"No; but a feller is likely ter git 'em, ye know," was Bruiser's smart answer.

"I suppose so, friend, I suppose so. Thee looks

as if thee was acquainted with snakes. Does thee get 'em often?"

A loud laugh, then, at the bullwhacker's expense, and Bruiser Bob flushed up and began to get angry. He wanted the fun all on his side, as is usually the case with fellows of his stamp.

"I has seen snakes," he retorted, "an' I has seen elephants, too; give me ther salve."

"Here it is, friend," passing it to him; "and give me thy dollar."

"I want ter try et first," laughed the bullwhacker.

"But, friend, I don't sell that way," protested the Quaker. "Pay me thy dollar, and if the salve does thee no good, then thy money will be returned."

"Yas; but I may not git a bite in ten years, don't yer see?"

"Thy dollar will be good if thee don't get a bite in twenty years. I do not sell except for cash, good friend."

"Oh, yas, yer does, ter me!" retorted the whacker, "yer has sold this hyar box on time, an' et may be a good long time afore ye git ther dudad fer et. But, I'm good fer a dollar."

The Quaker got deliberately out of the shabby old vehicle, and was an odd figure in his long coat and broad hat.

"My frien' friend," he said, in even tone, "thee must pay me what is my due, return the salve, or I must take it out of thy hide. Which will thee do?"

"Haw! haw! haw!"

The bruiser threw back his head and laughed like a jackass.

"Why, ter think of sech a thing!" he observed, when he stopped laughing. "I reckon ye ar' makin' somethin' of a mistake, ain't ye, uncle?"

"It is thee that is making the mistake," declared the Quaker, "as thee will soon find out to thy cost. Give me what is due me, my good man, and so save thyself a humiliation in the sight of thy fellows. Give me my salve or your dollar, and that at once. Which will thee do?"

The crowd looked on in greatest delight.

CHAPTER VI.

BRUISER BOB ENJOYS THE KNOCKER.

BRUISER BOB looked half silly, for a moment, and knew not what to do.

The mien of the Quaker was so earnest and sober, and his bearing so dignified, that the big ruffian was at loss.

If he had been attacked, if the Quaker had approached him in anger, showing "fight," then he would have known how to deal with him; but, as it was, he was abashed, as it were.

To strike such a person would be almost a crime, he felt in his heart, for it was only too evident that the Quaker could never carry out the threat he had uttered. But, it would never do for him, the boss "bruise" of the camp, to "take water" before the crowd.

"Keep off, uncle! keep off!" the bullwhacker cautioned, waving his hand as he stepped back. "Yer don't know me, or ye wouldn't talk fight. I'm Bruiser Bob, ther hard knocker of the hull region around."

"I know thee for a bragging bully!" the Quaker coolly asserted. "Give me my salve or the dollar, quick."

"I tell yer I has bought this hyar on time, an' I don't intend ter pay fer et till I has tried ther merits of et. When I git bit wi' a snake, an' give it a good trial, then I'll pay fer et, if it's any good. Better take et cool, old hoss!" and Bob put the box in his pocket.

"I see thee is bound to have it, my friend," the Quaker drawled. "I thought thee had good sense, but I find thee is lacking. Once more, my box or my money."

"Go ter blazes an' git it. Now keep off, old man; I has warned ye!"

The Quaker was making a deliberate advance upon the tough, and Bruiser was drawing back, still reluctant about meeting him in strife for fear of hurting him.

As for the crowd, it was urging them on, first one and then the other.

"Do him up, Quaker!" shouted one fellow.

"Polish him, Bob!" from another.

"Make him pony up, old Drab!"

"Yer kin laugh at him, Bob, he's no good!"

"Go in fer yer rights, Broadbrim!"

Such were the cries heard on every hand.

The climax soon came. The Quaker made a sudden spring forward, seized the bullwhacker by the collar, jerked him over and flopped him around as with the strength of a Hercules, and laid him out on his back on the ground, where

he proceeded to take the box of salve from his pocket.

This so delighted the crowd that it shouted itself half hoarse.

Bruiser had made a desperate effort to fight the Quaker off, in the last moment, but he appeared like a child in the hands of a strong man.

"I told thee what I would do," the Quaker placidly observed, as he rose with his recovered box in hand. "Another time thee must not try to be so smart, my friend. It is always best to weigh thy load before thee tries to carry it."

"I'm goin' ter measure you, that's what I'm goin' ter do!" the enraged whacker howled, as he was getting up. "Yer took me when I wasn't expectin' et, an' I wasn't half ready. Look out fer me, now, fer I'm comin'!"

"That's ther talk, Bruiser!"

"Go fer him!"

"Look out, Quaker!"

"He'll do ye up brown, now!"

"Thee had better go slow, friend," the Quaker warned, putting up his hand with palm outward. "Thee may get hurt if thee don't look out. I have no quarrel with thee; I am a peacemaker. All I wanted was my due."

"Yer will git that now, an' more, too!" cried the enraged bully, as he put up his hands. "I is goin' ter bu'st thee on thy snoot, so look out fer me. I don't low no man ter do ter me what you tried ter do, old hoss."

"I certainly did all I tried to do, friend," was the Quaker's easy remark. "Maybe I can do more, if thee is bound to have it. It is thy own business; I have no quarrel with thee."

Bruiser Bob was in no mood for words: nothing but acts would satisfy him at this stage. He sent out a blow straight at the Quaker's nose, certain that it was going to find its mark.

But—he made a big mistake! A quick dodge by the broadbrim; then a tap on the bully's proboscis that brought tears to his eyes, was what the crowd witnessed.

"I tell thee thee had better keep away," the Quaker warned.

"Waugh!" roared the now infuriated whacker, and at the corn-curer he sprung again.

This time his arms went around like the wings of a windmill, for he had no science, and he delivered several blows in quick succession, every one of which the Quaker brushed easily aside.

There the broadbrim stood, stiff and dignified, without a smile or a look of anger, his long coat buttoned at the top and his hat in place on his head; and he was turning aside the Bruiser's blows as though it was only play for him.

The crowd was cheering him with a will.

"Bully fer you, Quaker!"

"Give et up, Bruiser! You're no good!"

The Bruiser was now boiling over with rage, and fought with all the desperate energy he could bring to bear, but it was of no use. Every blow he aimed was brushed aside, and his arms were beginning to ache from contact with the iron-like forearm of the Quaker. Never had he met a man like this.

Finally, with a howl and execration he stopped and sprung back.

"Cuss yer!" he cried, "ef I can't hit ye I kin plug ye, an' hyar goes fer et, too!"

He reached for a weapon, and the crowd set up a shout of protest and would no doubt have interfered, but there was no need of it.

With a movement so quick no one could see how it was done, the Quaker had a brace of revolvers in his fists and the bullwhacker was covered before he could draw.

"Hold thee on!" he spoke, in his calm and easy way, but with a ring of determination in his voice. "If thee draw thy shooter thee is a dead man, and don't thee forget it!"

How the crowd did cheer then!

"I am a man of peace, my friend," the Quaker went on, "but, when occasion requires I can take care of Number One, every time. Now thee had better cool off and take thy friends in and treat them. Thee set out to play a joke, but thee has got the worst of it!"

Bruiser Bob was forced to recognize that he was worsted, much as he hated to admit defeat.

Letting go his hold of his revolver, he brought his hand around in sight, in token of submission, but hotly cried:

"Et ar' your turn now, old man, but mine will come! Yer thinks yer has done a smart thing by pickin' up a quarrel wi' me, ter show off yer strength, but I'll show ye afore ye are done wi' me that yer has made a mistake. Pards, mebby ye won't hev ter look very far fer the Movin' Mystery!"

Silence fell at once, and all eyes were upon the Quaker with new interest.

"What does thee mean?" the Quaker asked, looking around.

"Ther boyees knows what I means well enough," the whacker insinuated, as he wheeled and walked off.

"The best I ever saw, by trixey!" exclaimed Dempstrey, giving his companion a nudge. "The Quaker is a terror, isn't he?"

"He is that," the younger man agreed. "But what do you think of the hint Bruiser has let fall?"

"I don't know; I'll ask the fellow a question. Hey, Bob?"

"Wull, what ar' et?" Bob sullenly demanded.

"What did you mean by what you just now said?" the manager asked.

"What did I mean? Meant jest what I said, in course. Mebby this hyar cuss is ther one what threw ther iron daggers."

"What gives you that impression?"

"Nothin', only that he's a stranger hyar, an' a giant fer strength, that's all. Mebby he's ther cuss what done et."

Mr. Bartholomew Pinch was looking and listening intently.

"Good friends," he now spoke, "I hear thee talk, and I know what thee says; but, verily, I do not know what thee means. What is this that I am suspected of?"

"Look right hyar," spoke up Spring-heel Stephen. "Did yer ever see these hyar things afore?"

He held the four iron daggers up to view.

"Verily, I never did," was the candid response.

"Whar did ye come from this mornin'?"

"From thy neighbor camp of Powder Horn, where we stopped over night."

"That seems ter settle ther p'nt, then," accepted the mayor. "I reckons Bruler Bob ar' off ther track this hyar time."

All this time the woman in the vehicle had sat apparently unconcerned, and the darky on the box was like an ebony statue. Both evidently felt full confidence in the ability of the Quaker to take care of himself.

"But, good friends, what is all this about?" Mr. Pinch urged. "What is it that I was suspected of? I pray thee tell me so that I may know. These iron daggers have aroused my curiosity, I assure thee. For a moment I can even forego the telling of the merits of my wonderful salve."

Spring-heel made a brief statement of the matter, to which the Quaker listened with evident interest.

"Verily, that is strange," he remarked, when he had heard all. "It is more than strange. Charity," turning to his wife, "does thee think we had better stop here? Will it be safe?"

"I do not believe any one would harm us, Bartholomew," was the mild and even response. "Verily, I am not afraid to stay. Who would do injury to such as us, who travel only for the good of our fellows. Let us stay, by all means."

"That settles it; we stay," the Quaker declared. "The merits of the great Old Quaker Korn Knocker must be made known though the heavens fall. And now, who is the next to buy? Don't all speak at once, friends, and please don't attempt any more tricks. Only a dollar a box, and a hundred knocks in every box, and thee gets the best of the bargain every time. Here thee is, now; quick sales and all profits, cash on the spot, and money refunded if it don't cure. Good for headache, toothache, earache, and all other aches, good for every ill that flesh is heir to, but particularly good for corns, bunions and rheumatism."

CHAPTER VII.

A POET AT LARGE.

ALL things end, and ended after awhile the initiatory efforts of the Quaker to sell his wonderful "Korn Knocker."

This was merely his introduction, as he explained. In the afternoon, and again in the evening, he would devote an hour to the regular sale of his wonderful salve, when all who needed it might apply.

And having talked the crowd into a jolly mood, and having made numerous sales and worked himself into the good will of most of the camp's citizens, he assisted his wife out of the peculiar old vehicle and escorted her with due dignity to the Imperial Palace.

There the Quaker registered for himself and wife, and they retired to a room assigned them, leaving their darky to take care of the horse.

For the present no more was thought of them, as other interests were at hand to demand attention.

It was near time for the regular stage to arrive, and as the stage came only once a week to

this distant camp, it was an event of much importance.

The stage carried the mail, and the mail, under the circumstances, was eagerly welcomed, bringing as it did a week's news from the outer world at once. Then, too, the stage sometimes had a passenger.

About half an hour after the Quakers had entered the hotel, the stage came into the valley. It was a little late, and an eager crowd awaited it on the public Square, a crowd larger than usual, for no work had been done that day.

And then, too, not only was news looked for from without, but on this occasion Mexican Mustang had news to tell, and was only too anxious to tell it. Camp Mustang was growing in importance.

The Jehu brought his "hearse" to a stop in front of the Imperial.

Exchange of greetings between the driver and the crowd began at once, while the mail was handed out and the passengers alighted.

There were more passengers than usual, being no less than five or six.

Of these, two were women—one a fresh, good-looking young lady of twenty or thereabouts, plainly but tastefully dressed, and with a happy sprightly manner; the other was a little older, not quite so good-looking but not by any means bad-looking. She was tall and slender, and wore a long yellow duster that covered her to the ground.

These immediately hastened into the hotel, after the younger had cast an eager look around as though in search of some familiar face.

"Ruther nice calico," observed one in the crowd, eying them.

"You bet!" was the response.

That seemed to be the general sentiment.

The others of the passengers were men, one of whom was in person, of medium height and proportions, with smooth-shaved face, and who might have been mistaken for a preacher.

He was clad in black, and had rather a clerical air, his long coat buttoning well up to the chin and his white collar appearing above it in rather a priestly way. And, what added to the impression was a stovepipe hat. But, preacher he was not.

With the others we have nothing to do.

Entering the hotel, the two young women had not long to wait for the coming of a clerk, and the younger asked:

"Do you know Mr. John Wainwright, sir?"

"Yes; are you Miss Waterbar?"

Such the prompt response and counter-question.

"I am," the young woman answered. "I expected Mr. Wainwright would meet me here, but—"

"Yes; I know," the clerk interrupted. "He was called away a little while ago, however, and desired me to tell you that he would soon be back again, if you came in his absence."

"Oh, that is all right, sir. We want a room, if you please, and will register."

"Your room is already engaged, miss, and is ready for you. Mr. Wainwright has seen to that. I will bring the register."

With a bow the clerk turned away, and the ladies fell to chatting together while they awaited his return.

"Disappointing not to meet him at once," observed the elder. "I am dying to see what he looks like."

"I suppose you are, but it will be all right. You see he was thoughtful for me. I know you will like him, not so well as I do, of course, for—"

"Ha, ha! For if I do, you will pull my hair, eh?"

"Maybe I should; I don't know."

The register was soon brought, and the ladies put down their names, the one as Estelle Waterbar and the other as Hebe Youngblood.

After that they were shown to their room, where for the present we may leave them.

Meanwhile the ministerial-looking individual had been drawing attention to himself in a remarkable way. After alighting from the stage he had stepped a few paces away, when, clasping his left hand to his breast and lifting the right, he began to declaim poetry and quotations.

The driver, about to drive off, jerked his thumb in his direction and grinned, touching his forehead to indicate that he considered the man somewhat "off" his mental pedestal.

The crowd gave attention to the stranger, out of curiosity, thinking about the same as the driver.

"My friends, I love you!" the man cried, at the close of a poetic outburst. "One and all, I love you. As my dear Plato would say, 'Whoever is delighted in solitude, is either a wild

beast or a god.' Thank heaven I am neither. I find my delight in the haunts of men! How are you, brothers, anyhow?"

"Perty well, thank 'e, parson," one man responded.

"A parson, I!" the man exclaimed. "Kind friend, I am nothing of the sort. Are ye so blind that ye cannot read my soul upon my brow?"

"Crazy as a bedbug," muttered another.

"No; no parson am I, but a child of Nature—a poet, a true poet! As my own Aristotle has said: 'Poetry is more earnest and more philosophical than history.' Yes; a poet am I, running over with the riches of the best. Hear me, oh! hear me:

"Enthroned on throne of many-changing hues, Immortal Venus, artful child of Jove, I pray forsake me not, O Queen, nor bruise My heart wi' pain of love."

"Poetry, oh, poetry forever! You want ballad? You shall have it in any style you wish, with quotations from the masters thrown in free of charge. You want an elegy? It is on tap at your command. Poetry, poetry; anything and everything in the poetic line, and at prices to suit the times.

"Thou smildest, like a timid bird
My heart cowered fluttering in its place,
I saw thee but a moment's space,
And yet I could not frame a word." *Sappho!*

"Give me poetry or give me death! As dear Menander puts it—'Music hath charms the savage breast to move, and songs are Syrens that invite to love.' Or, as my beloved Philemon has said:

"Now, by the gods! it is not in the power
Of painting or of sculpture to express
Aught so divine as the fair form of Truth!
The creatures of their art may catch the eye;
But her sweet nature captivates the soul!"

"And it is poetry, poetry, *poetry!* First, last, all the time and forever! I live, move, and have my being in poetry. Citizens of Mexican Mustang, if you need anything in my line, just give me a call and see what I can do for you. I tell you, to adapt my language to your understanding for the once, that I can make a jackass laugh, or draw tears from a stone image, at pleasure."

Lifting his stovepipe with his left hand, making a sweeping wave with the right, and bowing low, this peculiar individual wheeled and entered the hotel.

"A crazy crank, by th' 'tarnal!" cried Spring-heel Stephen, in half disgust.

"All th' same I like ter hear him spout, even ef I don't know what he's talkin' about," declared one man.

"Some folks has strange notions," retorted Spring-heel, "an' everybody to their notion, as th' old woman said when she kissed her cow. But, th' feller ar' harmless, no doubt."

The post-office being the attraction now, the crowd moved that way, few following the poetic crank into the hotel.

Entering the bar-room, that individual stalked to the bar, where the clerk had just resumed his place after finishing his business with the ladies.

Leaning upon the bar, he said:

"Even poets, the favored ones of nature, must eat and sleep with the common herd. Can you fix me out with room and board?"

"Why, yes, we can make you comfortable, sir, if—ahem! That is to say, if you are comfortable in pocket. If—if you are responsible, you know. You mention the fact that you are a poet, and—"

"I catch on," the poet interrupted. "You would ascertain whether I have the base medium of gross commerce about my clothes in sufficient plenitude to settle the score. Isn't that it?"

"That's it, exactly."

"Do you know what my beloved Homer says?"

"I guess not."

"By Jove the stranger and the poor are sent,
And what to those we give, to Jove is lent."

"That sounds pretty well, the way you work it off, stranger; but, by Jove, we don't run this hotel on that plan. Poetry is cheap, but it takes the dudads to get a grip on bread and meat."

"Then you refuse to accept my product as legal tender for board and lodging."

"I have to, you see. Are you strapped?"

"When gold, as fleet as zephyr's pinion,
Escapes like any faithless minion
And flies me (as he flies me ever),
Do I pursue him? Never, never!
No, let the vile deserter go.
For who would court his direst foe?"

"However," bringing some money to view, "I guess I can ante for a week, if you are reasonable, so trot out your autograph album and I'll make it a priceless treasure by putting my name in it."

The register was pushed forward, and taking up the pen, the poetic individual wrote—

"CICERO SOCRATES BIFF, POET."

"Poetry to order at reasonable rates."

CHAPTER VIII.

LAYING OUT A PRETTY SCHEME.

"Hold on, sir, hold on!"

So suddenly exclaimed the clerk, as he saw the poet's pen was running on at a lively rate.

"Well, sir, what is the matter?" the poet blandly asked, laying the pen down, having finished what he had set out to write.

"What have you written there?"

"My name, of course."

"And what more?"

"Merely my business card."

"Well, confound your cheek! Do you think a hotel register is a signboard? What did you do that for?"

"To get the worth of my money, of course. Now if you had taken my poetry as legal tender, I would have given you a stunner on the flyleaf; but you insisted upon the cash, so I had to get some return. As peerless Sappho might say—"

"Hang Sappho, and you too! What is it, Mr. Dempstrey?"

The clerk turned suddenly from the poet to speak to Lenus Dempstrey, who had stepped up to the bar.

"The ladies?" the mine manager interrogated, in low tone.

Mr. Biff turned from the bar, and stood looking about the room in idle manner.

"It is all right, sir," responded the clerk.

"Then they are the ones?"

"There's the name," and he indicated the register.

Mr. Dempstrey looked, and nodded his head in a satisfied way.

"It is all right," he muttered, smiling. "But, what is the word? Did she ask for the man?"

"Yes, right off; and I said he had been called away."

"Good enough. We will take care of the rest of it, now. Keep all this to yourself, you know."

"Never fear."

The clerk winked, and Dempstrey turned and left the office.

Going out into the narrow hall, he ascended the stairs and went to his room at the rear.

There awaiting him was the young man with whom we have seen him in conversation at the Coffin Nails, whose name was Sanborn Barrat.

"Well?" the young man interrogated.

"It's all right."

"Then they asked for me, eh?"

"Yes; and the young one is the one we are after. Don't make any mistake on that point."

"Who is the other?"

"Her name is Hebe Youngblood."

"Do you know, Dempstrey, we are likely to run against a snag in her?"

"How is that?"

"Why, how the deuce am I to know whether Wainwright ever met her or not? I must recognize her or not recognize her, at once, and I tell you it's awkward."

Dempstrey rubbed his chin.

"You are right," he agreed.

"And how are we going to get around the point?"

"I'll tell you what: suppose I call on the ladies first and introduce myself. I can get the lay of the land, and may get some points to post you on. What do you say to that?"

"Just the thing!"

"I'll go at once. You hold the fort here until I return."

Dempstrey went out, and in a moment more was knocking at the door of the room occupied by the young women.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Miss Waterbar?" Dempstrey asked.

"No, sir," was the answer; "I am not Miss Waterbar; but she is right here, if you want to see her."

"I desire to speak to her, if you please."

The other young woman now appeared.

"I am Miss Waterbar, sir," she announced.

"Glad to know you. I am Lenus Dempstrey, manager of the Big Bee. If I may come in we will have a little chat."

"Oh! you are Mr. Dempstrey, then? Come right in, certainly. This lady is my friend, Miss Youngblood, Mr. Dempstrey."

The manager bowed, having now entered, and being invited to sit, took a chair.

"You have come to claim your property, of course, Miss Waterbar," he remarked, in his easy way.

"That is my business here, for one thing," the young woman owned.

"And your other business is—you can pardon a man of my years for coming at once to the point—the other business is, to meet and marry your lover."

A deep blush was the answer.

"You see I know all about it," the manager rattled on. "Your lover and I are warm friends, Miss Waterbar, and he has told me everything. I congratulate you upon the choice you have made. Wainwright is a prince among men, if you will pardon me for giving him a little praise. Of course you know him, Miss Youngblood?"

"No, sir; I have never met him," was the response.

"Indeed! Then you can hardly be called on to support my opinion. But, not necessary, since Miss Waterbar knows I speak but the truth. Enough of that, however. Miss Waterbar, I have called upon you for the purpose, one thing, of congratulating you upon your good fortune in coming into such a fine property as the Big Bee Mine; but for the more important purpose of telling you something concerning Wainwright."

A look of alarm came immediately upon the face of the young woman.

"Oh! do not be alarmed," the manager hastened to add. "It is nothing to occasion it, but merely something that he wanted you to understand. He ought to be here in a little while, and I will make the way smooth for him so that there will be no misunderstanding when he comes."

"What can you mean, sir?"

"I will tell you, and in as few words as possible. When John comes in, you must not address him by his right name, but as Sanborn Barrat. Can you remember that, do you think?"

Miss Waterbar's eyes were open at their widest, and she knew not what to make of all this.

"I am afraid I cannot comprehend," she muttered.

"Hardly to be expected that you would," was the smiling response. "But, that is the situation. You can remember the name?"

"Why, yes; it is the name of the friend John has told me about in his letters, unless I am greatly mistaken."

Dempstrey caught his breath for a second.

"A narrow escape for San, by thunder!" he exclaimed in thought.

"Ha!" he said aloud, "so John has mentioned him to you, has he? So much the better, then. It is all the easier explained. John is simply sailing under his friend's name, that is all."

"But, for what reason?"

"One of the simplest things in the world, and one of the best jokes you ever heard of. You see, John had some trouble with a set of ruffians here one night, shortly after he came here, and they threatened to kill him. They tried it, but made a mistake and went for Barrat instead of Wainwright, as they looked a little alike. And that gave the young men the idea they acted upon at once. Barrat went off, but John remained here under his name, and the ruffians meet him face to face every day and have never a suspicion of the true state of affairs. Ha! ha! ha! It is one of the best jokes I ever heard of."

"It is strange John never told me about that."

"He supposed it would all blow over in a day or two, but it has not, and the ruffians are still here, waiting for Wainwright to come back. Why, if they were to guess the truth, it would be a sad day for John, I tell you. So, you see how necessary it is to keep the secret for him. When you meet him you must not fail to use his assumed name; and it is even possible that, for the sake of safety, you will have to marry him under that name, to save his life. The real Barrat would never dare show his nose here, you understand, for it would be death to him; and it would be death just the same to your lover should the truth leak out."

"This is terrible! I could never consent to marry him under an assumed name, Mr. Dempstrey."

"Pshaw! what's the difference? You would marry the man and not the name. You might marry John Wainwright under *any* name and you would be his wife just the same."

"We could go away from here, however, and marry somewhere else."

"What's the use? He would have to return here under the name by which he is known, and you would have to answer to 'Mrs. Barrat.'

"It seems so odd."

"But it is simple as can be. This danger will pass, in due time, and then you and John can enjoy your right name, you see. Besides, for him to leave here now might betray the whole thing, for these ruffians would follow him with the hope of finding Wainwright—complicated, isn't it?—and there would be trouble right away. Now, at John's request, I have made known this situation to you, and all you will have to do will be to take care not to make any slip of the tongue when you speak to your lover or of him. Do you see?"

"Isn't that romantic!" exclaimed Miss Youngblood, clapping her hands in delight. "I would just revel in anything so romantic as that, Estelle."

"It is *too* romantic to suit me," the younger lady protested.

"You see how it is, however," the mine-manager urged. "There is a perfect understanding between your lover and his friend regarding it, and it is all right. I have made your lover superintendent of the mine, and when he marries you, you can make him manager in my place if you are so inclined. Fully two-thirds of the mine will be yours, you know. If there is anything Mexican Mustang takes to, it is a pretty woman, and when it is made known that you and Barrat are going to wed, the camp will not be able to do you honor enough. And it will be the richest joke ever heard of. On the other hand, if you won't agree, and won't help your lover to play the *role* that has been forced upon him, he will have to get out, that's all; will have to run away."

"I suppose I shall have to agree to it, then. But, I will talk it over with John when he comes."

"All right; settle it with him. I have posted you, and of course that is as far as I can do anything in the matter. Think it over, and tell your lover what you make up your mind to do. I'll be going. Glad to have made your acquaintance, ladies, truly glad, I assure you."

With that he left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DECEPTION WORKING NICELY.

AFTER the man had left the room, the young women looked at each other in silence for a moment.

Miss Waterbar appeared troubled in mind, but her companion was smiling and was evidently in the happiest mood imaginable.

She, the latter, was the first to speak.

"How romantic, how very romantic?" she exclaimed.

"Yes; altogether too romantic!" responded Estelle, soberly. "I do not like it at all."

"But, it is all right, any one can see that. Such a gentleman as Mr. Dempstrey evidently is, would have nothing to do with it, were it not."

"It is so strange that John never told me about it."

"Why, you little goose, he had hardly time. He has not been here long, as you yourself told me. Not over a month at the most. Indeed, it looks perfectly simple and natural to me."

"Oh, I suppose it is all right, but it is so strange. I am all the more anxious now to see John and hear about it from him."

"And I am anxious to see him, too. Do you suppose you will know him, after four years?"

"To be sure, I shall. I expect to find him changed some, of course; but I shall know him, no fear of that."

And so their talk ran on.

Meanwhile, Lenus Dempstrey had gone straight back to the room where he had left Sanborn Barrat, to find the young man pacing the floor in impatience, and the moment the mine-manager entered an inquiring gaze was turned upon him.

"Lucky for you that I did go there first," Dempstrey averred, as he sat down.

"Why, what is up?"

"Nothing, compared to what might have been. It might have been all up with our plans, if you had gone there first."

"Explain."

"Why, Wainwright had mentioned you to her in his letters, and as soon as I spoke your name she recognized it. It might have carried you off your base, for the moment, and filled her with suspicion."

"Oh, no, I guess not; I had thought of all that."

"Well, it's just as well as it is, anyhow. And about the other girl, I have found out that she

never met Wainwright, so you must greet her as a stranger."

"That's good, for that was the point that stuck me. Well, how does it now stand? What is expected of me?"

"Little need for you to ask that, since you know what the plan is. It is only necessary for you to carry out your part all right, and there will be no failure. If you fail, that will spoil everything."

"Trust me for that. I know John Wainwright as well as I know myself, almost, and I can play him to perfection, if I once get the right start. The worst will be the test when we meet. Will she detect the cheat? But, I must brave my way through that, and as she has not seen Wainwright in four years, I guess I will pass muster."

"I guess you will, unless you have lost some of your old nerve."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"Little fear of that, eh?"

"You are right. But, when am I to make my entrance?"

"Oh, any time after half an hour or so. Give them time to think over what I have told them, and so get a little used to the strangeness of the situation."

"All right. Once let us succeed, and it will be the best thing of our lives. It will make us both; and as for Wainwright—well, he is safe where he is, and will keep."

"But, what is to be done with him?"

"Keep him where he is, and that question will settle itself, ere long."

"You are right; that's the easiest and best way out of it. After that, no fear of anything. Then you can appear as Wainwright, and everything be serene, and no fear from the 'terrible scoundrels' who want your life—ha! ha! ha!"

In that mood their talk went on, but bringing out nothing of new interest to our romance, and so it may be passed.

About half an hour later Sanborn Barrat presented himself at the door of the ladies' room.

When the door was opened, it was by Miss Waterbar herself.

Barrat stood silent for one second, while their eyes met, and then, holding out his arms, exclaimed:

"Estelle!"

The young lady hesitated.

A look of half doubt was on her face, and she was eying the man critically.

"Don't you know me, Estelle?" he repeated, more passionately than before, and without further waiting he sprung forward, caught the girl in his arms, and pressed her to him.

He kissed her, forehead and cheeks, and then her lips, whispering her name in an endearing way.

And she, after the first struggle against doubt, returned his greeting in like manner, and then released herself, while he, pretending to see Miss Youngblood for the first time, took a step back as if half abashed.

"Hebe," said Estelle, turning her blushing face to her companion, "let me make you acquainted with Mr. Wainwright."

The other young woman stepped forward and extended her hand freely, uttering a cordial welcome and expressing great delight at the meeting with one of whom she had heard so much.

"But, Estelle, dear," the man reminded, "you have already disregarded the very thing I was careful to caution you about."

He spoke in pleasant tone, and with a smile.

"What do you mean?" the girl asked.

"I mean what Mr. Dempstrey came to warn you about. But, it is all right for this once, for of course it was necessary to introduce me to your friend under my true name. Now, however, please know me by the name of Sanborn Barrat, and so speak to me and of me, in private as well as in public. You have been told why."

"Is it really so important, then?" asked Estelle.

"It might mean death to me, to have my true name known," was the cautious answer. "Anyhow, it would necessitate my flight from here, and that would spoil all our fond hopes."

"But, what was the cause of this foolish taking of a friend's name?" inquired Estelle.

"Didn't Mr. Dempstrey tell you all about that?"

"In a general way, yes."

"Well, he told you all there was about it, I have no doubt. I interfered with a set of ruffians, in a bit of rascality they were up to, and they wanted my life. In some way they got mixed up regarding identity, and made it hot

for my pard. He told me to assume his name, and he disappeared, they thinking it is I who have gone. A rich joke on them if they only knew it."

"Then your friend is wearing your name?"

"Oh, no; using his own. He is a good many miles from here, and perfectly safe and out of danger. I am the one in danger, but so long as this secret is kept I am safe. You see, he knew what large interests I have at stake here, for I made a confidant of him, and was all the more willing to help me. He was like a brother to me, I assure you. Oh, it is all right, Estelle, and when these bad men have drifted away, as they will in the course of time, all will be serene again."

"And we are to be married under your assumed name?"

"What objection is there to that? It is the person, not the name, that is to be considered. It will be I whom you will have married."

"But, it is so strange that you never mentioned this in your letters."

"I can easily tell you why I did not. You see, I was in the hopes it might be all over and done with before you reached here, in which case there would have been no reason for mentioning it at all. But, it is not over, and so the disclosure had to be made, and I have to ask you to help me to carry on the deception."

"Oh, well, it must be right, or you would not tell me so."

"Of course it is all right, little one."

He took her hands in his, and they looked into each other's eyes.

"Four years have made changes in you, John," she remarked.

"Take care, the name," he cautioned, smiling.

"Yes; I suppose the change is noticeable to you. There is likewise a change in you, and I can only hope that what you find altered in me is as favorable. The time has added to your beauty and womanly grace, Estelle."

She blushed.

Miss Youngblood was looking at him with admiring eyes.

"I see you have not forgotten how to flatter, sir," said Estelle, archly.

"Truth is not flattery," was the response.

She drew her hands from his, and all sat down for a longer talk, without a suspicion that listening ears were at the wood partition that separated this room from the next.

An hour was spent there, and Sanborn Barrat in that time made himself secure.

"And the wedding?" he finally interrogated.

"Had I not better arrange the mine business fully first?" asked Estelle.

"I had rather you would not," urged the man. "I had rather marry you before you become rich. There are those who would say I had wed you for your fortune."

"How foolish!" the girl remarked. "See how long we have been engaged, long before I ever thought of being rich. I will marry you as soon as you are ready, and shall not delay about taking possession of my property, either."

"You would marry me this hour?"

"Yes."

"Then I am only sorry it is impossible. Our squire is out of town, and will not be home till to-morrow evening, and there is no one here who can perform the ceremony. If there was, I would take you at your word."

"How romantic!" exclaimed Miss Youngblood.

"You know what purpose I had in mind in coming here," said Estelle, blushing.

"Oh, yes, of course; but it is so romantic, you know. It is so *very* romantic. It seems so strange."

"Then shall we name to-morrow night as the time for the delightful event?" asked Barrat. "I can make the announcement, and preparations can be made."

"To-morrow night, if you wish," assented the young lady.

"Then to-morrow night it shall be."

"To-morrow night, eh?" muttered the listener. "Not if I know it, my gay and glib young man. I think you'll run against a snag before you get done here."

CHAPTER X.

AN EXCHANGE OF WARES.

THAT afternoon, true to his word, the old Quaker appeared on the Square to sell his salve again. A temporary platform had been put up, out of boxes and boards, and on that were the Quaker, his wife, and the colored driver of the paradoxical vehicle in which they had come to the camp.

The day had turned out to be a whole holiday, and the crowd on the Square was great.

All Mexican Mustang appeared to be out, and everybody seemed in a jolly mood, some being in a particularly "how-came-you-so" condition, owing to the poison dispensed at the Coffin Nails.

Bruiser Bob was on hand, and had made his boast that he was going to get even with "Old Broadbrim" or bust. He was about as "full" as the fullest, and was in his best mood for kicking up a disturbance of some sort.

Mayor Spring-heal Stephen, too, was on hand, almost in as good condition as the boss "bruiser," but with him there was no desire for trouble. He was jolly, as a rule, when a little "off."

Dempstrey and Barrat were on the piazza of the hotel, where they had been in conversation for some time.

The stranger, the poet, was flitting about here and there in the crowd, very busy all the time but doing nothing, or next to nothing. Once in awhile he would give vent to a poetic outburst.

The crowd watched the old Quaker while he made ready to begin his sale, and considerable interest was manifested, since trouble was looked for between him and the whacker.

During the time that had passed, the preparations for the coming night had not been allowed to languish.

The mayor had selected the men who were to act as police for the occasion, and, as has been said, Bruiser Bob was to have command of them—which was an honor Robert felt proud of, and he lost no opportunity to vociferate about what he intended to do if chance offered for the display of his efficiency as a detective police officer.

The cabin of Ben Hopson, the wounded blacksmith, was to be especially well guarded, since he had been already struck once and it was expected that the Moving Mystery would try to finish the work so nearly fatally begun.

It was believed that the coming night would be one of terror, for the deathwatch rapping heard in the saloon, when so many were present, was taken as an omen of ill.

The saloon being well filled at the time, there was no knowing whom the rappings had been intended for. Perhaps for the whole crowd; perhaps for a few marked ones only.

However, that remained to be seen.

Presently the old—if he was old—Quaker was ready for business.

His wife occupied a chair at his right, her hands sedately folded in her lap, and her face sweetly pensive.

The darky, Pompey Sunbrown, stood on his left, with an open hand-bag of the great Korn Knocker suspended from his shoulder by a strap.

Mr. Pinch presently raised his hand to enjoin silence, with a box of the wonderful salve in his grasp, and when he could be heard, lifted up his voice and made known the merits of the Knocker.

"I am before thee again, good friends," he announced, "in the guise of the Good Samaritan. No better friend ever entered thy camp than Bartholomew Pinch, with his great, world-renowned Old Quaker Korn Knocker. It is unquestionably the best thing of the kind that was ever put up, and it will cure a wider range of human ills than all others combined. It is good for all the ills and aches that flesh is heir to, and as a cure for baldness it has no equal. But it is particularly recommended for corns. If any man among thee has a corn, let him hold up his hand."

A good many hands went up.

"Thank thee, friends," the Quaker returned. "Now I am here to do thee good. I have here a remedy that will knock thy corns higher than Ben Franklin's kite, or money refunded. Only a dollar a box, and a hundred knocks in every box. Quick sales and all profits. I take the dollar and thee takes the salve, and thee gets the best of the bargain every time. A corn is a pest, and if an old vet, a hurter, you bet! So, come up and get, the best thing out yet, and ease all thy fret; 't will do it and let thee have peace all the rest of thy life. Now, who takes the first box? Don't all speak at once, but give me thy orders clear and loud."

He paused to look around to find a customer.

There were several within the next minute or more, and their dollars were passed over to the keeping of the woman.

"I am being cheated out of my very eyes, good friends," the Quaker loudly complained. "Thee has beat me at my own game, every time. I get only a plebeian dollar; thee gets a priceless boon for all thy aches and pains. But, who is the next? Now, don't be slow, for it's got

to go, as thee does know, for a dollar or so; and who is the next to swindle the poor old Quaker? Ha! hast thou, too, a corn, reverend sir?"

This to the poet, Cicero Socrates Biff, who had pushed his way well to the front, and who now held up his hand.

"Good sir," he responded, "I have not only one, but many. And in you, at last, do I behold a friend—a true friend."

"Ay, I am a Friend, good man," the Quaker assured.

"And, dear sir, to quote my charming Euripides—'To see a friend is grateful to the soul, come when he will.' Now, I have a proposition to make to you, honored sir, if you are willing to hear it."

"Thee may speak," the Quaker granted.

"I have noticed that you dip into odd rhyme now and then, as you proclaim the wonders of your magical balm. Now, if you will cure my corns, I will give you some bits of verse that you can be proud of."

"It is a bargain, friend," the Quaker quickly assented. "I recognize the trade value of poetry, but I am no poet. I say to thee, it is a bargain. Come up here and show me thy feet."

"What, show my feet in public?"

"A poet should never be ashamed of his feet, good man."

"It is on his feet that his reputation stands, honored savant. To show crippled feet would be ruinous to his vocation. I cannot accept. But, you give me the salve, and I will give you a sample of my verse. Then, if your salve helps my corns, I will pay what I owe in balance."

"Et ar' cash down or no deal," suddenly chimed in Bruiser Bob.

"Well spoken," accepted the Quaker. "That is one of my fixed rules, and I cannot break it."

"I can fix that, then," proposed the poet.

"How can thee fix it?"

"I will rattle off the equivalent of a dollar in my happiest style, and you can give me the salve on trial. If it cures me, you keep the rhymes; if not, you must refund them. Do you agree?"

"My friend, I take thee at thy own proposal."

"Noble savant, you are a prince. As my dear Æschylus has said—

"Tis a light thing for one who has his foot
Beyond the reach of evil to exhort
And counsel him who suffers."

"Your feet are doubtless free from corns, and hence you find it light to allow your generous nature to take me at my offer, and thus not only counsel but help me, a sufferer. Are you ready to hear my effusions?"

"Yes; thee can let them off," the Quaker soberly responded.

"Very well, here is the first:

"Unto this camp a Quaker came
To heal the halt, the blind, the lame;
And every other ill that's born,
Especially the festive corn."

"There, great doctor, is the first verse; what do you think of it?"

"I fear it is hardly equal to thy quotations, good man," was the response. "But let me hear the second effort."

"Very well, here is the second:

"You ante up your dollar here,
And take a box from this Qua-keer;
If it don't do you up k-r-smack,
You come and get your dollar back."

"Remarkable, truly remarkable," observed the Quaker, soberly, while the crowd laughed. "Here is thy box. I hope it will do thee good."

"Thanks, muchly," said the poet, as he received the box. "I don't exactly like that rhyme of 'Qua-keer,' but taking rhymes on the fly is not like shooting them sitting, you must be aware."

"No, I suppose not, friend, I suppose not. Now, who is the next who will do himself good by curing his corns and other ills? Here it is, the real and original Old Quaker Korn Knocker, worth five dollars a box, but selling for one. It will knock anything and everything that comes in its way. If thee is ailing in any way, no matter how, give the great Krockier a trial. Now, do not be rash, but pass up thy cash, and quick as a flash thee will throw away trash and soon cut a dash so dizzy and brash that thee will forget thee ever had a corn in thy life. Only a dollar a box, and quick sales and all—"

"Saay, ar' et good fer measles?"

So sung out Bruiser Bob, from his place in the crowd.

"Never was anyting better, friend," was the quick response; "and as for bad cases of softening of the brain it is a knocker indeed. Only a

dollar a box, cash on the spot. Will thee try another?"

"Do yer mean ter say that I've got softenin' of ther brain?" bellowed the bullwhacker.

"Oh, dear, no," was the denial. "I would not say so for the world, friend! I was merely noting thy symptoms, and talking broad generalities, that's all. Now who is the next—"

"Wait till yer gits done wi' me, afore yer howls fer any next," roared Mr. Bruiser.

"Well, what will thee have me do for thee? asked the Quaker.

"I owes yer a grudge, I does."

"Then, friend, take my advice and pay thy honest debts," rejoined the Quaker, with never a smile.

"I'll honest debt yer, b'gosh. I'm goin' ter have a box of that 'ar goo-goo o' yours, an' I ain't goin' ter pay nothin' fer it, nuther. D'y'e ketch on ter that 'ar?"

"My friend, thee is making a rash assertion. Thee had better weigh thy words a little more carefully. Thee may get something thee will not relish, so take heed to thy ways. I thought I had done with thee, and if I have to go for thee again thee will be left in poor condition for thy duties of the night, I warn thee."

CHAPTER XI.

BRUISER ROBERT CONVINCED.

BRUISER BOB had been making his boasts among his friends and cronies. He had been going around declaring what he was going to do to this Quaker, in retaliation for the treatment he had received at his hands; so, those who were in the secret were full of excitement in anticipation of the coming fracas, as they believed it would be. And hardly a man of them but expected that Robert would get the worst of it.

Nevertheless, for the sake of the fun, they had encouraged Robert, and the whacker had not sense enough to take warning by what he had already experienced and stay out of it. He was not half the fighter he believed himself to be, but had had his own way so long at Mexican Mustang that he believed himself a "chief."

"Take heed ter my ways nothin'!" he now bellowed. "I know I kin wollop yer, old Gray Coat, and I'm goin' ter do et, too."

"Thee had better not try it on, friend, better not," the Quaker warned yet again. "It will be bad for thy health if thee does, be sure of that."

"I'll show yer whether et wull or not. That other time wasn't no fair go, fer I wasn't ready fer ye. Come down hyar, now, an' I'll polish ye off in ther real old style."

"I decline to do anything of the sort, friend," was the response to that. "I am a man of peace, and never resort to arms unless I am forced to do so. Thee had better leave me alone. Take heed to thy ways."

"Or, as Athenodorus of old has said," chimed in the poet, "Young men, hear an old man, to whom old men hearkened when he was young."

"Thee has quoted well this time, friend," complimented the Quaker.

"You wants ter keep your lip out of this hyar," cried the bullwhacker. "Ef yer don't, I'll take half a dozen yards of yer poetry an' hang yer with et. Saay, thar is one condition on which I'll let ye alone, Old Broadbrim."

"That is kind of thee, anyhow," said the Quaker. "What is thy condition, my awful blower?"

"I'll blow ye, afore I'm done with yer! Ther condition ar' this hyar: That you give me one box of that 'ar' stuff o' yours, an' you eat another right hyar in ther presence o' these witnesses."

"Thee is reasonable, delightfully reasonable, friend," quoth the Quaker, in sober manner, "and he would be a mean man that would object, truly. Still, object I must. A doctor seldom takes his own medicine, you know, and as seldom gives it to another for nothing."

"Then yer won't do et?"

"Hardly."

"Then take this hyar!"

With the words he drew back his arm and threw something, and an egg was seen flying through the air.

With a movement quicker than eye could follow, a revolver seemed actually to spring into the Quaker's hand, there was a report, and the flying egg was shattered over the heads of the crowd!

The egg was a dead "ripe" one, and immediately a delightful aroma pervaded the air.

Seeing what had been done, the crowd set up a wild cheering, except that portion that had been sprinkled by the flying *eau de cologne*, who were swearing vehemently.

Immediately another egg was thrown, which was met by a bullet in mid-air with even more

grace, promptness and precision than the first, and the crowd made a hasty scramble to get out of the way.

"Thee had better stop thy disgraceful conduct, friend," spoke the Quaker, soberly. "If thee don't, the people will be likely to lynch thee."

Robert evidently had no more eggs, having thought that two would no doubt be sufficient for his purpose, and he could only stare at the Quaker with bulging eyes and open mouth.

"Cuss yer!" cried Spring-heel Stephen, who had got some of the flying perfume on his person, "ef yer throws another one o' them 'ar things, by ther mighty I'll bore ye wi' plum-bago."

"I wish I had more of em," cried the bull-whacker, "I'd show yer, an' him too. I'd git in one at him, yer kin bet. That 'ar shootin' was dumb luck, that's all et war."

"That's all it was, friend," admitted the Quaker. "It is a streak of luck that is to be relied on, however, as thee will find if occasion comes for me to practice any target-shooting at thee. Now I hope thee will go away in peace and give me no more trouble. Thee is interfering with my business."

Bruiser Bob had awakened to the fact that he was no match for the Quaker, but his foolish pride would not allow him to admit it.

"Give me ther salve, he bellowed, an' we'll call it square. I won't make thee eat none."

He was mocking the Quaker's manner of speech.

A howl of laughter greeted his offer of compromise, so generously made.

"No; I don't reckon yer will make him eat any," cried Spring-heel Stephen. "Better look out yer don't git made ter eat et yerself."

"I'd like ter see him make me do et, that's all. Ef I had another ripe egg, I bet I'd fetch him a lick that would scent him up. Come, Quaker, ef yer wants ter git rid o' me, come ter tarins."

The whacker would have liked to draw a weapon and make the Quaker submit to his dictation, as he had been in the habit of doing, but he dared not for the life of him put a hand to his hip, even though the Quaker's weapon had disappeared from view.

"My only terms thee does well know," responded the Quaker. "A dollar a box, and cash on the spot. Give me thy dollar and thee may take the Knocker. And now who is the next? Only a dollar a box, and a hundred knocks in every box. Quick sales and all profits, and I am the loser every time. This plan, thee must see, is good for thee and likewise me, as thee must agree; so ready be with the little fee, and the great Knocker is thine at the price quoted. Who is the next? Don't all—"

Bruiser Bob had pushed his way nearer to the front than before, and now interrupted in his blattant manner.

"Hyar's who's next," he bellowed. "I hav told yer that I wants one o' them 'ar boxes, an' I'm goin' ter have it."

"Thee is welcome, friend, if thee has thy dollar to pay."

"I'm goin' ter have et fer nothin', that's how I'm goin' ter have et, you kin jest bet. Fork et over!"

Just how he was going to get it did not appear.

"Now, my friend, I am getting tired of playing with thee," the Quaker very quietly remarked.

"Waal, then, come ter biz an' fork over ther box."

"I will, for a dollar."

"Yer will git no dollar out o' me."

The ruffian had now reached the edge of the temporary platform, and had laid a hand on one of the supporting planks.

"Then thee will get no salve," was the Quaker's decision. "Now go away, whil' thee is in condition to depart. If thee don't, the worse it will be for thee, so be warned."

Bruiser laid hold upon the plank with both hands.

"Et wull, hey?" he cried. "Now, mister, you fork over that 'ar stuff, or down comes yer dorg house, and don't yer fergit it."

But the Quaker's revolver was looking him in the eye.

"And if thee stiffens one muscle, good friend," the quiet man of peace responded, "there will be a dead dog under the platform, and it will be thee. Let go thy hold, instantly!"

There was a ring to the command that meant business.

With a sullen growl the fighter of the camp obeyed, amidst the hisses on every side.

"Pompey Sunbrown," spoke the Quaker, to his darky.

"Yes, sah!" the response.

"Thee will havo to get down and teach this fellow a lesson. I am a man of peace, and do not want to engago in any fighting myself. Just thee jump down there and tune him up a little for me."

The darky grinned from ear to ear, and laid aside his hand-bag of salve.

Bruiser Bob straightened up, and there was blood in his eye. Was he going to be made sport of in this fashion?

"Say, mister," he exclaimed, "ef ye don't want a dead nigger on yer hands, keep him up thar. Ef he gits down hyar I'll more'n paralyze him, you kin bet!"

"We have heard so much of thy boasting that wo are getting tired of it, my friend. Pompey, get thee down and do as I have bid thee."

"Yes, sah!"

With a light leap the darky was off the boards, and in a second more was before Mr. Robert with his ebony fists up for business.

The whacker made a pass at him, but the darky ducked, and the next moment Robert was catching it left and right, and was soon sent flying heels over head into the crowd.

When he got up it was with a roar, and he was rushing to the attack again when Spring-heel Stephen interfered.

"Hold right on hyar, Bruiser, ye cussed fool!" he cried. "Ain't ye got sense ernough ter know when yer is licked? Ef yer hasn't, I has, an' I tells yer to stop. Yer is wanted fer biz ter-night."

"You stand out of ther way, Spring-heel," the fellow cried.

"Nary a stand! But you let up, or I'll have ye 'rested an' locked up till night."

Truth to tell, Robert was glad of a good excuse to get out of the trouble he had brought upon himself, so did not make a very strong resistance.

"You is ther boss of ther camp, Spring-heel," he said; "an' ef yer means biz, why in course I hes ter do as yer says. But I will 'tend ter these hyar fellers some other time. I kin lick 'em, an' I knows I kin."

He turned and walked off sullenly, while the crowd laughed.

The darky mounted to his place, grinning, and the sale of the Old Quaker Korn Knocker went on.

Mr. Bartholomew Pinch spent about an hour selling his wonderful salve, and at the end of that time was ready to stop, and did.

Before leaving the platform, however, he turned to the crowd and said:

"Citizens, I want to rent a furnished cabin for the remainder of my stay here in thy camp. Can any of thee let me have such a thing? I will pay liberally. My wife here has been so shocked by the profanity that reaches our ears from the bar-room of the hotel, that she desires a change. Has any one a cabin to let?"

"Trim Travers has no further use fer his'n," spoke up a citizen, with a ghastly attempt at humor.

"That's so," echoed the mayor. "Trim's cabin will jest suit ye, and yer is welcome to et, since pore Trim is no more."

"Very well, I accept it," agreed the Quaker. "I will pay thee whatever is right, and will move into it at once. And now, friends, don't forget the sale again this evening, all being well with us, and please be on hand to give me thy patronage. Remember, thee gets all the profits, while I get only the paltry dollar."

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEATHWATCH AGAIN.

So, after the sale was over, the Quaker moved into the cabin that had been made vacant by the demise of Trim Travers.

In the mean time, the blacksmith, Ben Hopson, had been gaining strength all day, and there was no danger now that his wound was going to prove fatal. He was mending as rapidly as could be expected.

And now that night was coming on, the horrors of the previous night were being more talked about. Many there were who declared that their noses would not be seen outside of their cabin doors between sunset and sunrise, and they fully meant it, too.

The "Moving Mystery," as they had come to call the mysterious thrower of the iron daggers, was greatly feared, and prudence was at a premium among the citizens who were not cowards in fact.

Lenus Dempstrey and Sanborn Barret had had

a long talk, after the interview of the latter with the ladies.

The coming wedding was already announced, and it was creating quite a stir in the camp.

It would be the first event of the kind ever witnessed there, and it was an event to be made much of.

Preparations were beginning to be planned, and the next evening was to be a red-letter one in the camp's history, if all went well.

About the time that it was fairly dark, Bruiser Bob and three others took up their station near the cabin occupied by the blacksmith, to begin their night's vigil. Other watchmen took their places in other parts of the camp at the same time.

An hour later the old Quaker appeared again on the Square, his rude platform now lighted up by torches, but his crowd was not large, for there was a wholesome fear of the dreaded iron daggers.

He spent an hour or so, after which he returned to the cabin, in company with his wife and their darky driver.

After that the camp was unusually quiet for that hour.

The shutters of the hotel bar-room and of the Coffin Nails were all closed, and the street was almost deserted. Those who were brave enough to be out at all, kept within the shadows as much as possible, and dodged into the hotel or saloon as though an evil hand were after them and ready to close upon them.

But the hours dragged on without any event to excite anybody, and the night watchmen in various parts of the camp were beginning to pick up courage.

The Quaker and his wife were sitting in their cabin, talking, when there came a low knocking at the door.

Mr. Pinch opened the door and admitted the poet, Mr. Biff.

The light in the cabin was low, and the poet entered without a word, and the door closed after him.

He first bowed to the Quaker lady, and then he and the Quaker grasped hands in a friendly shake, each smiling broadly as they did so.

"You are quite a Quaker, on my word you are," he, the poet, averred.

"And you are an excellent clown poet," the Quaker returned. "But let us not drop our assumed characters till we are done with them for good."

"You mean even in private?"

"Yes; even in private, good friend," with the sober face and solemn mien. "I think it better so, don't thee?"

"Yes; no doubt you are right, noble savant. As dear Sappho might say— But perhaps we can forego the quotations for the present, eh?"

"Just as thee pleases, good friend."

"And as for my original verse, it is as bad as your grammar."

"I agree with thee, fully, friend. But, let us compare notes and see what we have discovered here."

"Well, have you found out anything?"

"I have my eye upon a certain party, and thee can guess him."

"Dempstrey?"

"Exactly, friend."

"And I have discovered enough to support the suspicions I had."

"Then you—hang the Quaker! Let us talk in low tones and naturally, for we can't keep it up in private without hard work."

"That suits me better. Go ahead."

"Then you think there is trouble in the air, do you?"

"I do."

"What is it?"

"Just what I told you, some scheme to do harm to the girl in some way. And Dempstrey and Barrat are in it."

"But you haven't caught on to what it is, eh?"

"No; and don't seem able to. I'm not detective enough for that, I guess."

"Well, what would you suggest to be done?"

"Somebody must caution the girl and learn what is to be learned from her. I am not the one to do it."

"Nor I."

"Why can't I take that part?" spoke up the Quaker lady.

"I think you are the one for the work," agreed the poet.

"And so do I," the Quaker echoed. "Perhaps you had better call on them in the morning."

"I will; and I'll gather from your further talk what I shall be expected to try to accomplish. Go on; I'll not interrupt any more."

The lady became silent, and leaned back in her chair in a sleepy way.

"You have heard that the wedding is to come off to-morrow night, I suppose," the Quaker remarked.

"Yes; and that would prove that the young lady has recognized her lover all right, and that there is no deception about that part of the affair."

"It would seem so; but I am not satisfied."

"No? and why?"

"I will tell you. When they came here, why was not the young man on hand to meet them?"

"Was said to be out of town."

"Said to be, yes; but was he? He was not, but was in hiding in a room in the hotel."

"Ha! you are coming at something. How came you to know this?"

"I was at the bar, parleying with the clerk, when Dempstrey came down to interview the clerk for him, to find out if the right parties had arrived."

"Then there is a plot that the clerk is in, think you?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Well, what next?"

"The clerk gave the names of the young women, and Dempstrey went back with the report. A little later I went to my room, which, fortunately, adjoins theirs, and there I was able to hear much."

"Good for you!"

"I heard the plans laid for the wedding, by Wainwright and the girl, and it struck me with force that all was not right, and I said to myself that I would be on hand when it was ready to come off. I have had my eye upon that young man, and he is a crooked stick."

"Glad you have found him out. We must work, now, to get our points against them by to-morrow night. They are giving us scant time, rushing the matter as they are doing."

"That is so."

The woman spoke now.

"No need to hurry yourselves too much," she said, "if your game is not ready to be taken in."

"How so?"

"Why, a sufficient warning can be given the girl, to lead her to delay the affair a little, if she has sound sense."

"And she has that, never fear," spoke the poet. "But, the best of us is liable to be deceived sometimes, you know. Her lover is playing her false somehow. He is not the man she takes him to be."

"Then they must not be allowed to marry."

"They shall not be, I can assure you of that."

"But, you have not been able to get at the truth of what their scheme is, as yet?" interrogated the Quaker.

"Not in fine, but I know that it is some plot to cheat this girl out of her property. Her lover is not the angel she has painted him to be, as I suspected when I set out."

"Well, we will look after him, and find out what is wrong with him. But, how about all this mystery this camp seems to be afflicted with. What do you think of all that?"

"You mean the iron daggers, of course."

"Yes; and the thing they call the Moving Mystery. It seems to be well worth investigating."

"And perhaps you have a mind to investigate it."

"I intend to do so before I leave this camp, of that I assure you. I never let a thing like that pass by unnoticed."

"But, how do you explain it?" the poet asked.

"That is to say, what do you suspect?"

"I don't explain it at all, yet, of course. As to what I suspect—rascality of some sort, as you may be sure it is at the bottom."

"An' this thing they call the deathwatch?"

"That is a part of the other, if I mistake not. I should like to hear it, to judge of it for myself."

In the same instant that he spoke a low, regular tapping sound was heard, a sound that at first could not be located.

"By Heavens, I believe that is it!" the poet exclaimed.

"I am inclined to believe it is. Where does it seem to be, to you?"

"There at the lower part of the door."

"No, it isn't; it is here at the side of the cabin," spoke up the woman.

"This is more than strange," the Quaker marveled, "for to me it seems to be at the closed window there. Can it be the deathwatch?"

"It must be."

"Then it is our business to locate it, and discover what it is if we can."

"How are we going to do it?"

They talked in whispers, and as they talked the deathwatch was still ticking in its steady, regular way.

"Here, let us stand together, and make out sure where it is," spoke the Quaker, rising, "and then we will dash out and see whether it's a person or not."

They stood together in the center of the cabin, and there listened for a full half-minute or longer. Then the woman lifted her arm and pointed to a spot near one corner.

The men listened a moment longer, and finally they too pointed to the same spot. The sound was located, and it now remained to discover what it was, if that were possible. Would they be successful?

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER IRON DAGGER.

"It is positively there," whispered the Quaker—to which the others agreed. There seemed no room for mistake on that point.

"But, how to learn what it is?" queried the poet.

"We must observe caution, first of all," the Quaker argued.

"It does not seem likely to scare away."

"No; but that is not it. If it is a man, we must capture him, don't you see? If not a man, then we must learn what it is."

"What do you suggest?" asked the woman.

"I will tell you: You take your stand there at the window, dear, and we will step silently out of doors. As soon as we step out, you throw the shutter open and look out."

"But, the iron daggers. Are you not afraid?"

"No; I don't believe the thrower of the daggers would harm a peaceful Quaker. Besides, he had ample opportunity to do so this evening, on the Square."

"Well, let us hasten, while the sound is being kept up."

"All right; you get ready at the window."

The woman stepped silently to the window, while the two men advanced to the door.

In a moment all were ready, then the latch of the door was lifted, and the woman unhooked the shutter.

The men stepped softly out, and as they disappeared the woman flung wide open the window-shutter and looked out.

Not a thing was to be seen of any living creature.

Immediately upon going out, the men had started around the cabin in different directions, and soon met under the window.

The moon was bright, but at the rear of the cabin there was a deep shadow, and in the shelter of that they stopped and listened to see whether the sound was gone or not.

The ticking was still heard, but it was no longer at the corner.

Now it could not be located. It was, seemingly, everywhere.

"What do you make of it?" whispered the poet.

"It baffles me," admitted the other.

"It is certainly not in the cabin," decided the woman.

"And it is positively not out here," the Quaker asserted.

"You step back there where we stood when we located the sound so positively," said the Quaker to his wife, "and see if it is in the same place yet."

The woman obeyed, and they waited.

She soon returned.

"No; it is right under the floor, now," she informed them.

They looked at one another in the dim light there in the shadow. Then the Quaker examined the lower logs of the cabin.

No chance for anything to get under there, as he soon found and announced to the others. It was a thing that baffled them all, and not a little, either.

They re-entered the cabin.

"Don't you hear it?" asked the woman.

"Yes; it is there," and the poet pointed to the roof.

"Why, no it isn't," disputed the woman; "it is under the floor, there," and she pointed.

"This is mighty strange," declared the Quaker, "for to me it seems to be there in the other corner."

All listened attentively for some time, and finally had to admit that they were unable to locate the mysterious sound at all.

"Let us close the door and window again," suggested the woman.

"A good idea. Do so."

She closed the window while the poet shut

the door, and then standing all close together in the middle of the floor they listened yet again.

After some moments they decided that the sound came from under the cabin, as the woman had first declared, and were about making further investigations, when the sound ceased, and was heard no more.

"So, that is the deathwatch, is it?" mused the Quaker.

"No wonder people here are excited over it, eh?" remarked the poet.

"When you take it in connection with the mysterious deaths that have taken place here," the woman added.

"It is something that I much want to know more about," the Quaker declared.

"We are making a slow beginning."

"True; but every case has to begin, you know."

The poet took his leave and the door was closed and locked.

Meanwhile, about the cabin of the blacksmith everything was orderly and quiet, and the guardsmen were on duty and wide awake.

Bruiser Bob was good for one thing, and that one thing was, to watch. He had been trusted to perform such duty a good many times, and had never yet failed in giving satisfaction.

It was after midnight, the moon was shining brightly, and the men were all standing in a group at the door of the cabin, talking, when they were startled at hearing the ticking of the deathwatch, seeming near at hand! They stopped short in their talk, and looked at one another.

"Thar et ar!" whispered Bob.

There were four of the fellows, and it needed about three to brace up the courage of the fourth, all around.

"Et ar', sure enough, Bob."

"Whar be et?"

"Seems ter be in ther air, don't et?"

"In ther air yer grandmother! Et ar' thar under taer edge of ther cabin."

"Like fun et ar'! Et ar' off thar to ther right, that ar' plain. Seems ter come from that way."

"Ye durn fools!" snapped the Bruiser, "ain't ye got no ears? Et are right on top o' ther cabin, that's whar it be. Let's take a look."

Boldly he stepped out at a distance, and looked up at the roof.

Nothing was there to repay him for his pains, and now the sound seemed to be under the cabin.

It was puzzling, and he was loth to admit that his ears were playing him such pranks as that. Where was it, anyhow?

"Find anything?" asked one man.

"Nary a thing," Bob admitted.

"Let's surround ther cabin, an' see ef we kin find out what et ar'."

"That's what I was goin' ter tell ye ter do. Go ahead, and one man stay at each corner fer a minute."

This they did, and remained till Bob called them back to the door.

"Waal," he asked, "whar do ye say et ar' now?"

"Et ar' on ther roof," declared the one who had before said it was under the cabin.

"Et ar' in ther air, an' hang me ef I kin tell whar et be," insisted the one who had before urged that it was under the edge of the cabin.

No one of them could agree upon it for a moment.

But they all heard the sound plainly enough, be it where it might, and not one but was scared.

"Darn me ef I like et," muttered Bruiser, in low tone.

"A feller don't know who et ar' callin', an' mebby ther iron dagger ain't fur off."

"Wonder ef Ben ar' awake?" questioned one.

"Why?"

"We might step in an' ax him ef he hears et."

It was a proposition that all were ready to agree to, and at once.

The mention of the iron dagger had not tended to inspire them with confidence in their duties.

Accordingly, Bruiser Bob unlocked the door, and they entered, the last man getting his person within the shelter of the cabin as speedily as possible.

The wounded blacksmith was awake.

"You heard that sound, too, did you?" he asked.

"Yas; hev you heerd et?"

"I hear it now."

He was lying on his rude bunk on the ground.

"Whar do et seem ter be?" inquired the bullwhacker captain of the guard.

"It's under the ground, of that I am cer-

tain. I have listened attentively, and I've located it."

"Whar next is it goin' to be?" muttered Bob.

"Put your ear to the ground, and see if it isn't as I tell you."

"Et ar' everywhere an' nowhar," declared Bob. "None of us kin agree as ter whar et ar'."

"Looks jest like we wanted ter be contrary," put in another, "but that ain't so. It's a ghost sound, an' thar's no locatin' et ter a sartainty."

"An' we has a good name fer et, ther Movin' Mystery."

"It isn't moving now, however," urged the blacksmith. "You put your ears to the ground as I do, and listen."

"Waal, ter satterfy ye, I'll do et," agreed Bob, and he got down and laid his ear to the ground.

"Et ar', sure as shootin'!" he exclaimed.

The others made a move to get down to listen, but at that instant the sound ceased, and was heard no more for some time.

After waiting several minutes for it to be heard again, and as it did not come back, Bruiser Bob suggested that they resume their places outside.

"Et ain't doin' our duty, in hyar," he declared.

So, they filed out, and again took up their post and their conversation at the door.

They had been there but a little while when a startling thing happened.

Some object came flying toward them, causing those who chanced to see it to wink, and in the same moment there was a thud against the door.

In alarm they fell back, looking at the door.

There, buried in the wood, was another of the iron daggers!

Every man's face was pale, and every one looked at the others in a questioning way.

And their question, had they put it in words, would have been, perhaps, "Shall we run away?" That was the expression each face had.

Bruiser Bob answered it for them, in action. With a bound forward he threw open the door and sprung in, and the others were not slow to follow. Then taking hold of the dagger, he pulled it out of the plank, and closed the door with a slam.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE QUAKER'S DISCOVERY.

Not only did they close the door, but they barred it as well.

Brave men as they would have declared themselves to be, they were trembling in their boots now.

And little wonder, too.

"Thet 'ar war a close shave," gasped one man.

"Et war durn close fer me," growled Bruiser Bob. "I don't want no more of et in mine."

"Do yer think et war throwed at any of us?" another queried. "Ther Movin' Mystery hev been a mighty good shot every other time."

"Jest what I was askin' myself when you spoke," declared Bob. "Et feels ter me as if thar's somethin' on ther handle o' this hyar dagger. Turn up that 'ar light till I sees."

The light was promptly turned up brighter.

"Et ar', sure as yer live," the fellow exclaimed.

"Et ar' what?"

"Hyar's a paper on ther handle of ther iron dagger."

"Yer don't say so. Read et, Bob, fer mebbe et ar' a message to us."

"Better wait till I gits et off, hadn't ye? Lend us yer knife hyar, an' cut this thread."

This was speedily done, and when a considerable length of strong thread had been unwound, a paper came off in the whacker's hand.

Dropping the dagger, he spread the paper out and read it.

It was a message from the Mystery.

"What do et read?" was the impatient demand.

Bruiser answered not till he had made it out clearly for himself, when he proceeded to read it aloud.

It was as follows:

"YOU GALOOTS OF MUSTANG:—

"Some of you is marked men. If yer is wantin' ter save your lives, git out of hyar to oncer! And I means in p'tic'lar them knowned as Bruiser Bob, Ben Hopson, Simmy Wilkins an' Larry Wobblers. If ye don't want ther iron dagger, git up an' git."

"Yours fer blud, the—

"MOVING MYSTERY."

"Thar, what do ye think o' that?" demanded Bruiser, when he had done.

"I knows what I'll do," declared Simmy Wilkins.

"What ar' that?" asked Bruiser.

"I'm goin' ter git up an' git out, jest as I'm warned ter do, an' ask no fool questions, either."

"Scared off, eh?" asked the wounded man, from his place on the floor.

"Call et that, if yer wants to," was the response. "I calls et hoss-sense. Ther Mystery means business, that we knows well enough, don't we?"

"I do, at any rate; but you see I can't go, wounded as I am."

"Would ye go ef ye wasn't hurt?" asked Bob.

"I don't believe I would."

"I thought not. You have got jest that much grit, ter hang on till yer gits a dose that will settle ye."

"What are you going to do, Bob?"

"I'm with Simmy. I has had enough ter take my appetite, an' I don't want no more."

They talked on, having plenty of food for conversation, but not one of them all mentioned a word about going cut on guard again.

Perhaps they thought they could do better service inside. Anyhow, inside they remained, keeping the wounded man company, and likewise keeping the door securely barred.

About this time, in the Coffin Nails Saloon, several men, all the worse for liquor, were bantering one another to cross the Square in the open light.

It was about time for the saloon to close, as the hour was late and the crowd had thinned out, and Dan Burns was anxious to get his place closed, having been up so late on the previous night.

"I tells yer ye dassent do it," cried Mayor Spring-heel, in response to one fellow's boasting.

"An' I tells yer I dares do et, too," was the response. "I ain't afeerd, ef ther rest of yer is. I'll bet rocks that I dare do et."

If he could have known about the message of the dagger, perhaps he would not have been so bold, for this fellow was the Larry Wobblers mentioned in it. He was one of the "called."

"Anyhow, I don't advise yer to do et," Spring-heel, cautioned.

"Do yer bet that I dassent?"

"I think you had better not."

"Yer dassent bet, that's what is ther matter with yer, an' that's yer way of gettin' out of et."

"Has yer got enough money ter pay yer funeral 'spense?"

"I has a tennet what sez I kin do ther trick."

"Waal, hyar's another what sez yer can't then, sence yer will have et so. I don't take no banter like that."

"Make yer bet an' git it done with, fer I wants ter shut up shop," hastened the proprietor. "Yer is a fool though, Larry, ter try et, after what ye hev seen."

"Fool nothin'," sneered Larry, with more whisky than brain in his head. "I am goin' ter do et, an' hyar's ther money. You hold ther stakes, Dan, an' I'll drop in an' get 'em ter-morer."

The rest of it was soon arranged, and the start was made, the mayor and the others standing in the shadow in front of the saloon and watching.

Larry Wobblers stepped out upon the Square with a swaggering air and set off in the direction of the hotel on the other side, and there was not a person in sight anywhere.

"I guess yer is goin' ter lose yer money, Spring-heel," observed Dan, when the venturesome fellow had got safely half-way across without anything happening to bring him to a stop.

"Et looks like et," the mayor confessed.

But, the next instant it did not look so much like it.

Larry was seen to stop short, he threw up his arms, a cry was heard, and he fell forward.

"Got et, by ther 'ternel!" Spring-heel cried.

"He hev fer sure!" another echoed; and he started to run to the assistance of the fallen man.

Only a step had he taken, though, when he thought of what he was doing and stopped short. Maybe there was another dagger where that one had come from.

"But, mebby he's shammin'," one man suggested.

"Nary a sham," asserted Spring-heel. "Larry ain't that sort. He would 'a' gone clear across, an' then would 'a' yelled back at us; that would 'a' been Larry. No; he's got a dagger."

"We'd orter go out ther an' help him."

"An' git another dagger fired at us? You kin do et ef yer wants ter."

"But, Larry may not be dead, an' help in time might save him, ye know. What is goin' ter be done about et?"

"Yer don't git me out thar," assured the mayor. "If he ain't hurt bad, he kin crawl in

hyar; an' if he ar' hurt so bad he can't crawl, then he is likely ter die anyhow, so let him be."

So it was decided, and there being no one willing to take the risk, the bold but ill-fated man on the Square was left to his fate, while the crowd again took shelter in the saloon.

Not a man of them thought of going home after that, and it looked as though the saloon would have to provide sleeping space for them on the tables and on the floor round about.

The door had been closed but a few moments, when the sound of the deathwatch was heard as on the previous night.

It appeared to come from directly under the floor, and seemed louder and more distinct. Then, soon, there was a knock at the door that was not the deathwatch, and a voice accompanied it.

"Let me in hyar, ye cowardly galoots," was demanded. "A purty set o' fellers you is, ter let a pard lay out thar an' die for the want o' help."

There was some hesitation about opening the door, but presently it was done, when the demand had become more imperative, and there stood Larry Wobblers, supporting himself on the door-frame.

In his shoulder was buried an iron dagger, in all respects like the others that have already been mentioned.

Needless to say there was excitement enough now, and no sleep was thought of, and the outer door was not opened again until broad daylight.

But, we are too fast, for the story of the night is not yet done. Another chapter remains to be unfolded.

Some time in the night the Quaker, in his cabin, was wakened out of his sleep by the ticking of the deathwatch seemingly close to his ear.

He sat up with almost a start.

"What is it?" whispered his wife, at his side.

"Do you hear that?"

"Yes; it wakened me a few moments ago, and I have been listening to it. It is under the ground; there is no mistake this time."

The Quaker laid his ear to the ground and listened.

"You are right. And it is no spirit, either. I am going to investigate this matter, and find out more about it. I want to know what this deathwatch is."

The man had risen from the couch, and now a light burned in the cabin.

Neither he nor his wife had disrobed, and it needed only for him to draw on his boots and put on his hat, and he was dressed.

The deathwatch was still ticking away, loud and distinct, and there was now no mistaking where it came from. It seemed to be directly under the cabin, and only a few feet away.

In one corner stood a big hammer, and a thought struck the Quaker as his eyes rested on it.

The floor of the cabin was rock, as in fact so was most of the valley bottom around there, and taking up the hammer he struck some blows on the rock.

Immediately the deathwatch was stilled.

"Guess I have stopped the fun," the Quaker observed. "My belief is that a human hand makes that noise."

Two more blows he struck, in imitation of the others as they had been heard, and the next moment they were repeated beneath the ground.

"A discovery, as I live!" the Quaker exclaimed.

He struck three blows, then.

Three were given in answer, in like manner.

Then two, three and four, in succession; and in the same order came the responding taps beneath!

Full of quiet excitement, the Quaker repeated the experiment several times, until there was no longer any doubt in the minds of himself and wife. Somebody was beneath that rock, answering the signals.

CHAPTER XV.

AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

"I AM going to know more about this," spoke the Quaker, determinedly.

"How do you propose doing it?" inquired his good wife, as interested as he in the matter.

"Are you afraid to remain here alone?" he asked.

"No; but what are you going to do?"

"I am going out and try to lead this mysterious deathwatch, as they call it, or be led by it. It sounds to me like a call or signal."

"It would not surprise me to learn that it is. But, I can not see how you are going to

lead it, or be led by it. What plan have you in mind? I am not afraid to remain here, of course."

"Why, by these signals, of course. You know most of the bottom here is rock, and it will be easy enough."

"All right; go ahead, and I will secure the door while you are gone."

Just then was heard the mysterious rappings again.

There were three short, sharp blows.

The Quaker answered with his hammer at once, in like manner, after which he opened the door and looked out.

The moon had now disappeared, and all was dark save for the dim light of the stars. He was right in judging it to be near morning.

With a parting word with his wife he stepped out, the door was closed after him and fastened, and he turned his steps to the southern side of the little valley, where the bottom was particularly rocky.

When he had gone a little distance, he stopped and gave three sharp blows on the rock.

In a few moments the signal was repeated, in the direction of the cabin.

He gave the signal again, at an interval of a minute.

It was answered, nearer at hand.

"There is no longer any doubt," the Quaker mused. "It is a signal below ground. Is it some one calling for help? I must wait and see."

He waited, and presently the rapping was heard again. It was only a few feet away, and hastening to the spot as near as he could judge it, the Quaker answered.

Silence followed for a time.

Presently the rapping was heard again, some distance away to the right.

Once more the Quaker hurried to that spot, as before, and again responded in like manner.

All was still, then, for a period, when the knocking was repeated, yet further away in the same direction.

"It is a man with brain in his head, whoever it is," mused the Quaker, as he followed up the lead. "He has taken the only plan possible to lead me to some point."

Needless to follow step by step these rappings and responses. They were kept up until the Quaker had been led almost to the wall on the southern side of the gulch, when a surprise suddenly came to his ears.

It was a voice, coming from the very ground at his feet.

"Hello!" it called. "Are you there, friend, if friend you are?"

Before answering, the Quaker stooped to the ground to feel his way, for here it was very dark.

He feared some opening into which he might tumble, if he did not take care. But, as he stooped, feeling with his hand, his fingers came into contact with a fissure in the rocky floor, and he understood it all.

"Yes; here I am," he answered, "and I'm a friend to all honest men. Who and what are you?"

"Thank heaven!" was the glad exclamation. "I am a prisoner down here in this underground hell. For mercy's sake, help me out, if you can!"

"I'll be willing enough to do it, if I can," was the response. "Can you suggest a plan?"

"There is one plan that may work."

"Name it."

"I know of one place where the rock is very thin, and if I could only reach it, I know we could break through. Can you follow the sound of my hammer to that spot, do you think?"

"I can try it, but it is very dark, and I must go slow."

"All right, I'll lead you."

Immediately the hammer sounded on the rock below, and moved off, still to the southward.

The Quaker followed it, climbing where it led, though it conducted him into some almost inaccessible places.

Evidently he was not the man to give up easily, or he would have abandoned that unseen and certainly dangerous trail.

Suddenly, when he had gained a most difficult place, where probably no one in the camp had ever been, having no call to go there, he slipped and fell.

It was not exactly a fall, but he slid down a sharp incline for many feet, bringing up at the bottom with something of a shock.

And as he struck the bottom he noted that the rock gave forth a peculiarly hollow sound under his boots.

He listened for the beating of the "death-watch," and hearing it not, struck a match to

discover, if possible, what kind of a hole he was in.

The light of the match revealed a bluff on one side and a deep indentation of the surface, as if it had suddenly sunk. They gully thus made was filled with rubbish, that evidently had tumbled down from above, including a mountain pine, now dried to a tinder.

Lighting slivers from this the Quaker soon had a blaze that lit up the sink-hole perfectly.

Just then, almost beneath him, he heard the rap-rap-rap of his mysterious subterranean guide, to which he responded at once, on the flattened rock down which he had slid into the gully or sink.

"This is the place," a muffled voice shouted. "See if you can't break the rock through. I will stand out of the way."

The Quaker began sounding with his heavy hammer, to find the thinnest spot, and having discovered it, gave some strong blows, when, suddenly, the rock broke through and he almost dropped into the orifice.

It was a hole as big around as a barrel, and the fragments fell several feet to the floor beneath.

"Thank God!" exclaimed the prisoner, as he hurried under the opening. "I had almost given up all hope of ever getting out of this awful place alive."

"Thee is not out yet, friend," advised the Quaker. "However, thee soon will be, if I can find any way to assist thee, so have courage."

He could not see the man in the underground chamber but judged that he was not far below.

"Wait thee, awhile, friend, while I seek for means to get thee out of the pit," commanded Quaker.

Not far away were bushes and saplings, growing up from the debris of the sink, and now dimly outlined by the fortunate pine-tree fire; so going to these the Quaker cut a sapling of good length, with a heavy handled knife which, somehow, mysteriously appeared in his grasp.

Trimming this sapling he returned to the hole, and shoving the stick down told the prisoner to catch hold of it.

The man below grasped it at once, when, with amazing strength, the Quaker slowly drew the prisoner from the dismal depths.

"Heaven be praised!" the man fervently ejaculated, when he was safe out of the wretched rock labyrinth. "Give me your hand, friend, for you have saved my life."

"Here it is, and welcome thee is to it," was the response. And the Quaker extended his strong right hand. "But, tell me who thee is, friend, and how thee came to be in such a fix."

They shook hands heartily, and as they did so the other made response.

"My name, sir," he said, "is John Wainwright; and I was led into a trap by the most infernal of false friends. It will not be well for Sanborn Barret, when I find him, the execrable scoundrel!"

The Quaker gave vent to a long whistle, a whistle of surprise.

"Come, come with me!" he urged, hastily. "It will soon be daybreak, and you must be safe in my cabin and out of sight before any person can see you. I know something about this man Barrat, and we will now foil the rogue and run him in."

"Then you are not what you first seemed to be—a Quaker?"

"Hardly! But, no time to explain anything now: let's get out of here and to the cabin before it is light."

They lost no time in scrambling up out of the sink, greatly aided by the pine-tree fire, and once out of the hole, they made off in the direction of the cabin.

But few words were exchanged on the way, and the cabin was reached before any one was abroad to discover them.

The guide knocked at the door, and getting a response from within, told who he was and that he had a stranger with him.

There was a little delay, but presently the door was opened and the two men hastily entered, closing and securing the door after them.

Then, in the light of the lamp, the Quaker's wife saw a young man, not bad-looking, but now terribly emaciated and covered with dirt from the underground prison from which he had just been so miraculously released.

His first need, instantly recognized, was food—which was at once provided, and as the man ate they talked.

Their conversation need not be set forth here.

It was a long one, lasting until after the sun was up.

When it ended, John Wainwright, as he

claimed to be, was allowed to throw himself upon the bunk, where, hid from prying eyes by a rude blanket curtain, he fell asleep almost immediately.

CHAPTER XVI.

SURPRISES, ARRESTS AND EXPLANATIONS.

THAT morning, when Mexican Mustang ventured out of doors, there was greater excitement than ever.

Nearly every person in the camp had heard the deathwatch during the night, and one and all agreed that it had been particularly loud and portentous, and when Bruiser Bob and his companions came forward with their story, and the fact of another victim of the iron dagger was made known, the excitement almost went beyond bounds.

A good many thought that Mexican Mustang was about as good a place to get away from as they had ever seen, and proceeded to "git up and git" accordingly. And not least among these were Bruiser Bob and Simmy Wilkins, who had received particular warning.

"Et hev proved that et ar' no joke!" asserted the whacker, "an' I'm not overish anxious ter see any more of et."

So, he and Simmy, and others with them, made an early departure, in quest of a clime more salubrious, and less haunted by "unseen spirits that stalk the air."

Said Spring-heal Stephen:

"Things hyar hev come to a purty pass! This hyar comin' night I'm goin' ter play a different game with ther Movin' Mystery. I'm goin' ter have half of ther men of ther camp on guard, an' then ef nothin' comes of et, why, great Scott! I reckon I'll be ready ter light out meself. This hyar thing ar' gettin' too mighty numerous ter be wholesome."

And he set about making his preparations accordingly.

Larry Wobbles had not been fatally hurt, and was taken to the cabin of the blacksmith, where he could be cared for along with Hopson.

In the forenoon of that day Miss Waterbar and her companion made their appearance at the office of the Big Bee, where Miss Waterbar produced her papers and made her claim to the property.

Lenus Dempstrey greeted her with every showing of pleasure, willingly admitting her claim, and she took formal possession. She then told him to keep right on as manager until further notice. And that business done, she returned to the hotel, escorted by Barrat.

Dempstrey performed the same office for Miss Youngblood, Miss Waterbar's gushing companion, and she was as gushing as ever.

These two, by the way, were to stand up with the other couple that evening at their marriage.

When the young ladies reached their room, they found awaiting them Mrs. Charity Pinch, the Quaker lady.

This was something of a surprise, but she surprised them still more by what she had to disclose to them. What that was need not be set forth, since the denouement will reveal all.

She was with them an hour or longer, after which she took her leave and returned to the cabin, where she spent the rest of the day in helping her husband and the poet in taking care of the real John Wainwright, as the escaped prisoner has been shown to be.

That day was a dull one. The Quaker did not appear on the Square to sell his great Korn Knocker, the poet offered but little in his line, and a general depression appeared to be over everybody. But that was easily accounted for, for the camp was about terrorized over the doings of the Moving Mystery.

The coming night was looked forward to with a feeling of dread all around.

So imperative had been the ticking of the deathwatch on the previous night, particularly its last hours, that ill was looked for.

Nevertheless, preparations for the wedding went steadily forward. It was to take place in the main room of the hotel at nine o'clock in the evening, and a big time was expected as a matter of course. Even the dead watch warning could not prevent a hilarious "blo.. out" on the happy occasion.

The main room of the hotel was parlor, dining-room and sitting-room in one, and at the hour named it was well filled with the leading personages of the camp, while the "Squire" was on hand to tie the terrible knot—as some mean fellow has termed it.

Among those present in whom we have an interest were Mayor Spring-heal Stephen, who held down a front seat; the old Quaker and his wife, who occupied places near the mayor; and

Mr. Cicero Socrates Biff, the poet. Besides these were many others, reckoned as being among the best citizens of the camp.

It was a little past the hour when a side door opened and Sanborn Barrat and Miss Waterbar entered, arm in arm, followed by the mine-manager and Miss Youngblood in like manner.

The faces of the ladies were pale, and their manner nervous, but they carried themselves well. Barrat and Dempstrey looked exultant.

All the windows of the room had been closely shut, to prevent anything in the nature of an iron dagger from finding entrance.

The couple took their place before the "Squire," the other couple near them, and the ceremony began.

But, to the unbounded amazement of all, only a preliminary question or two had been asked, when something happened—something of so startling a nature that it almost took away the breath of the crowd.

The old Quaker and the poet rose up, the Quaker's wife with them, and took a step forward. The poet and the woman had revolvers in hand, and with them they covered Dempstrey and Barrat, while, in the same moment, the Quaker snapped handcuffs upon their wrists with marvelous celerity.

It was all done so suddenly that no one could have interfered, and the men themselves had no chance to offer resistance, it was so entirely unlooked-for and astounding.

"What does this mean?" thundered Dempstrey, facing the trio, as the two women sprung away from him and Barrat.

"It means that you are our prisoners," answered the Quaker, with never a sign of his peculiar drawl now.

"And who in the infernal are you?" cried Barrat, hotly, trying to free his fettered hands.

For answer, the Quaker removed his broad-brim hat, his spectacles and a wig, and bowing, said:

"Gentlemen, I am Deadwood Dick, Junior, at your service!"

A deafening uproar greeted the announcement, for it was a name that was not unknown in that wild and remote camp.

The crowd cheered and whooped wildly, and while they did so the Quaker lady removed her disguise, showing herself to be none other than Dick's brave wife, Kate—Kodak Kate!

At mention of the name, the name that had grown to be such a terror to evil-doers of every stripe, the two rascals paled, actually trembling in their boots. They knew what this meant for them.

"As peerless Sappho might say," observed the poet, "we have got the bulge on you, sons of the Heliot base!"

And then he, too, tore away a disguise, and was transformed in an instant.

At sight of him thus, Miss Waterbar exclaimed:

"Why, it's Mr. Comings!"

"As you see, my dear young lady," was the smiling acknowledgment.

"But, what is ther meanin' of all this hyer?" demanded Spring-heel Stephen, glaring around in an almost bewildered manner.

Deadwood Dick lifted his hand to enjoin silence, and spoke:

"Citizens, if you will keep order and give us your attention for a few minutes, we will tell you everything and fully satisfy the curiosity we have awakened."

There was a wild shout for the story. The prisoners, recognizing the uselessness of denying anything, with such a man as Deadwood Dick against them, stood by with faces pale and set in expression.

As soon as he could he heard again, Dick said:

"Let me introduce Mr. Birdsall Comings, a lawyer," indicating the late "poet," "who will address you first."

The lawyer bowed, and immediately followed:

"Gentlemen, you see before you in these prisoners two of the greatest rascals living. I will tell you a simple story, in few words, but one which will give you a full understanding of my part in this matter."

"Miss Waterbar's great uncle died some months ago, leaving her his interest in the Big Bee Mine here at Mexican Mustang. His interest was about three-quarters of it all. In order to establish her claim, she had to come here in person, which she was all the more willing to do, as her lover, John Wainwright, was here, and they were to be married."

"She corresponded with him, and it was all arranged, she to come here and enter her claim to the mine, and here they would marry. So, armed with the papers, she set out, accompanied

by her friend, Miss Youngblood. But, that was not all of it. I had a suspicion in my mind that all was not straight, and that there was a chance that she would be cheated out of her property, so I prepared to come after her, in disguise. How I came, you all know."

"Well, knowing Deadwood Dick, and falling in with him, I asked his help in the matter, when, what was my surprise when he told me that he already had a case at this very place. The Big Bee had been robbed, and a person interested had engaged him to come here and try to get at the bottom of the mystery. Finding then that our interests lay together, we set out to work together. And that we have made a success of it you can readily see. Here are our prisoners, one being Sanborn Barrat, who was playing the role of John Wainwright, whose friend and companion he had been; and the other, the robber of the mine—*Mr. Lenus Dempstrey*."

"I can give the lie to that," growled Barrat, desperately. "I am John Wainwright, under an assumed name."

The door opened, and into the room stepped the real John Wainwright, pale and thin.

"You are a cowardly liar, as well as a black-hearted villain!" he cried. "You imprisoned me in the old mine, you and this other villain together, and thought to rob me of everything worth living for; but, thanks to Deadwood Dick, you have been foiled!"

Deadwood Dick now rose to tell his story.

"What you have heard already, gentlemen, is true," he said. "I have but little more to add. Still, I am going to explain away the mystery of the deathwatch and the iron daggers. The deathwatch was nothing but the signals made by this prisoner, in a natural cavern under the camp here, to draw the attention of some one to his place of confinement. I happened to get at the truth of this, and so solved the mystery, and was the means of saving him. That it was heard in so many places, and was so hard to locate, was owing to your inability to define whence it came. So much for the deathwatch."

"And the iron daggers, they were fired by no one other than this villain before you, this Lenus Dempstrey, as he is known to you. He robbed the mine, and hid the bullion, and fearing that he had been seen, planned to kill those whom he suspected. Then, when he took a hand in the imprisonment of Wainwright, he was still more suspicious, and set about killing off those who he thought were most to be feared. He made the daggers himself, being a blacksmith by trade, and fired them from a spring gun. When he fired those with such fatal effect at the victims on the Square, he was on top of the hotel here, hiding behind the false front."

The manager was trembling, and a perspiration stood out upon his face. There was a general howl for his life.

Proof for everything was readily produced—proof so convincing that it was accepted by every one in camp as beyond question, the truth.

John Wainwright and Sanborn Barrat had been "pards" for some time, and together had come to Mexican Mustang. There Barrat recognized Dempstrey as a scamp with whom he had once been associated, and learning all about the matter of the mine, it was planned to put Wainwright out of the way, Barrat to assume his place, and so come in for the property, which he was to share with Dempstrey. In order to hold it, he would have to marry under his own name, and hence the really shrewd scheme we have seen them trying to carry out.

Deadwood Dick and the lawyer took charge of the rogues, who, in due time, were severely dealt with.

The real John Wainwright and Miss Waterbar were married then and there, the ladies being ready for the change, having been told all about it by the pretending Quaker lady Kodak Kate, that morning.

Ben Hopson and Larry Wobblers recovered, and Bruiser Bob, Simmy Wilkins, and the others who had gone away, returned, boasting bravely what they would do if anything of the sort ever came up again.

The "Moving Mystery" had been solved, or "laid," and the honor was due to Deadwood Dick. He promptly shared it with his brave wife and the lawyer, who had so well played their parts in the affair. After a few days, during which time they were the honored guests of the camp, they rode away in Dick's peculiar vehicle, drawn by the Quaker-colored mule and driven by the darky in buttons. A delegation of enthusiastic citizens accompanied them a mile out of the camp.

It will be many a day before the affair will be

forgotten by those who took part in it, and at Mexican Mustang it is always spoken of as—"Deadwood Dick's Deathwatch; or, The Moving Mystery at Mexican Mustang."

THE END.

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- 660 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Insurance Case.
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- 678 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Discovery; or, Found a Fortune.
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BY CHARLES MORRIS.

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- 122 Phil Hardy, the Boss Boy.
- 126 Picayune Pete; or, Nicodemus, the Dog Detective.
- 130 Detective Dick; or, The Hero in Rags.
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- 157 Mike Merry, the Harbor Police Boy.
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- 170 A Trump Card; or, Will Wildfire Wins and Loses.
- 174 Bob Rockett; or, Mysteries of New York.
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- 187 Fred Halyard, the Life Boat Boy; or, The Smugglers.
- 189 Bob Rockett; or, Driven to the Wall.
- 196 Shadowed; or, Bob Rockett's Fight for Life.
- 206 Dark Paul, the Tiger King.
- 212 Dashing Dave, the Dandy Detective.
- 220 Tom Tanner; or, The Black Sheep of the Flock.
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- 262 The Young Sharps; or, Rolllicking Mike's Hot Trail.
- 274 Jolly Jim, the Detective Apprentice.
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- 324 Ralph Ready, the Hotel Boy Detective.
- 341 Tony Thorne, the Vagabond Detective.
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- 32 Bad Woolf; or, The Girl Dead-Shot.
- 39 Death-Face, Detective; or, Life in New York.
- 45 Old Avalanche; or, Wild Edna, the Girl Brigand.
- 53 Jim Bludsoe, Jr., the Boy Phenix.
- 61 Buckhorn Bill; or, The Red Rifle Team.
- 69 Gold Rifle, the Sharpshooter; or, The Boy Detective.
- 80 Rosebud Rob; or, Nugget Ned, the Knight.
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- 92 Canada Chet; or, Old Anaconda in Sitting Bull's Camp.
- 96 Watch-Eye; or, Arabs and Angels of a Great City.
- 113 Jack Hoyle, the Young Speculator.
- 117 Gilt-Edged Dick, the Spy Detective.
- 121 Cinnamom Chip, the Girl Sport.
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- 145 Captain Ferret, the New York Detective.
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- 258 Sierra Sam's Seven; or, The Stolen Bride.
- 278 Jumbo Joe, the Boy Patrol; or, The Rival Heirs.
- 277 Denver Doll, the Detective Queen.
- 281 Denver Doll's Victory.
- 285 Denver Doll's Decoy; or, Little Bill's Bonanza.
- 291 Turk the Boy Ferret.
- 296 Denver Doll's Drift; or, The Road Queen.
- 299 A No. 1, the Dashing Toll-Taker.
- 303 Liza Jane, the Girl Miner; or, the Iron-Nerved Sport.
- 325 Kelley, Hickey & Co., the Detectives of Philadelphia.
- 330 Little Qui-sk-Shot; or, The Dead Face of Daggersville.
- 334 Kangaroo Kit; or, The Mysterious Miner.
- 339 Kangaroo Kit's Racket.
- 343 Manhattan Mike, the Bowery Blood.
- 358 First-Class Fred, the Gent from Gopher.
- 368 Yreka Jim, the Gold-Gatherer; or, The Life Lottery.
- 372 Yreka Jim's Prize.
- 378 Nabob Ned; or, The Secret of Slab City.
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- 385 Yreka Jim's Joker; or, The Rivals of Red Nose.
- 389 Bicycle Ben; or, The Lion of Lightning Lode.
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- 400 Wrinkles, the Night-Watch Detective.
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- 426 Sam Slabides, the Beggar-Boy Detective.
- 434 Jim Beak and Pal, Private Detectives.
- 438 Santa Fe Sni, the Slasher.
- 486 SealSkin Sam, the Sparkler.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH.

- 23 Nick o' the Night; or, The Boy Spy of '76.
- 37 The Hidden Lodge; or, The Little Hunter.
- 47 Nightingale Nat; or, The Forest Captains.
- 64 Dandy Jack; or, The Outlaws of the Oregon Trail.
- 82 Kit Harefoot the Wood-Hawk.
- 94 Midnight Jack; or, The Boy Trapper.
- 106 Old Frosty, the Guide; or, The White Queen.
- 123 Klown Charley, the White Mustang.
- 139 Judge Lynch Jr.; or, The Boy Vigilante.
- 155 Gold Trigger, the Sport; or, The Girl Avenger.
- 169 Tornado Tom; or, Injun Jack from Red Core.
- 188 Ned Temple, the Border Boy.
- 198 Arkansas; or, The Queen of Fate's Revenge.
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- 215 Captain Bullet; or, Little Topknot's Crusade.
- 231 Plucky Phil; or, Rosa, the Red Jezebel.
- 241 Bill Bravo; or, The Roughs of the Rockies.
- 255 Captain Apoll, the King-Pin of Bowie.
- 267 The Buckskin Detective.
- 279 Old Winch; or, The Buckskin Desperadoes.
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- 302 The Mountain Detective; or, The Trigger Bar Bully.
- 316 Old Eclipse, Trump Card of Arizona.
- 326 The Ten Pards; or, The Terror of Take-Notice.
- 336 Big Benson; or, The Queen of the Lasso.
- 345 Pittless Matt; or, Red Thunderbolt's Secret.
- 356 Cool Sam and Pard; or, The Terrible Six.
- 366 Velvet Foot, the Indian Detective.
- 386 Captain Cutlass; or, The Black-Handed Girl Foe.
- 396 Rough Rob; or, The Twin Champions of Blue Blazes.
- 411 The Silken Lasso; or, The Rose of Ranch Robin.
- 418 Felix Fox, the Boy Spotter.
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- 470 The Boy Shadow; or, Felix Fox's Hunt.
- 477 The Excisor Sport; or, The Washington Spotter.
- 499 Single Sight, the One-Eyed Sport.
- 502 Branded Ben, the Night Ferret.
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- 594 Little Lon, the Street-Singer Detective.
- 610 Old Skinner, the Gold Skunk; or, Tony Sharp on Guard.
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- 637 Dick Donn, the Dock Boy Detective.
- 645 Kit, the Pavement Sharp.
- 658 Billy Bantam, the Boy Beagle.
- 671 Jersey Jed, the Boy Hustler; or, Shadowing the Shadower.
- 685 Happy Hugh, the Boy Musician Detective.
- 701 Photograph Fred, the Camera Sharp.
- 715 Wide Awake Len, the Quaker City Ferret.

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- 519 Captain Mystery; or, Five in One.
- 531 Daisy Dare, the Sport from Denver.
- 557 Old Bombshell, the Ranger Detective.
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- 619 The Boy Tramp Detective; or, The Double Grip Witness.
- 629 Violet Vane, the Velvet Sport.
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- 682 Wild Vulcan, the Lone-Range Rider.
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- 705 Violet Vane's View; or, The Crafty Detective's Craft.
- 714 Old Misery, the Man from Missouri.
- 724 Violet Vane's Vengeance.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

- 7 The Flying Yankee; or, The Ocean Outcast.
- 17 Ralph Roy, the Boy Buccaneer; or, The Fugitive Yacht.
- 24 Diamond Dirk; or, The Mystery of the Yellowstone.
- 62 The Shadow Ship; or, The Rival Lieutenants.
- 75 The Boy Doppelganger; or, The Cruise of the Sea-Wolf.
- 102 Dick Dead-Eye, the Boy Smuggler.
- 111 The Sea-Devil; or, The Midshipman's Legacy.
- 116 The Hussar Captain; or, The Hermit of Hell Gate.
- 197 Little Grit; or, Bessie, the Stock-Tender's Daughter.
- 204 Gold Plume; or, Buffalo Bill, the Pony Express Rider.
- 216 Bison Bill, the Prince of the Reins; or, Buffalo Bill's Pluck.
- 222 Grit, the Bravo Sport; or, The Woman Trailer.
- 229 Crimson King; or, The Cowboy's Triumph.
- 237 Lone Star, the Cowboy Captain.
- 245 Merle, the Middy; or, The Freelance Heir.
- 250 The Midshipman Mutineer; or, Brandt, the Buccaneer.
- 264 The Floating Feather; or, Merle Monte's Treasure.
- 269 The Gold Ship; or, Merle, the Condemned.
- 276 Merle Monte's Crusade; or, "The Gold Ship" Chase.
- 280 Merle Monte's Fate; or, Pearl, the Pirate's Bride.
- 284 The Sea Marauder; or, Merle Monte's Pledge.
- 287 Billy Blue-Eyes, the Boy Rover of the Rio Grande.
- 304 The Dead Shot Dandy; or, Bento, the Boy Bugler.
- 308 Keno Kit; or, Dead Shot Dandy's Double.
- 314 The Mysterious Marauder; or, The Boy Bugler's Trail.
- 377 Bonodell, the Boy Rover; or, The Flagless Schooner.
- 385 The Indian Pilot; or, The Search for Pirate Island.
- 387 Warpath Will, the Boy Phantom.
- 398 Seawulf, the Boy Lieutenant.
- 402 Isidor, the Young Conspirator; or, The Fatal League.
- 407 The Boy Insurgent; or, The Cuban Vendetta.
- 412 The Wild Yachtsman; or, The War-Cloud's Cruise.
- 429 Duncan Dare, the Boy Refugee.
- 433 A Cabin Boy's Luck; or, The Corsair.
- 437 The Sea Raider.
- 441 The Ocean Firefly; or, A Middy's Vengeance.
- 446 Haphazard Harry; or, The Scapgegrace of the Sea.
- 450 Wizard Will; or, The Boy Ferret of New York.
- 454 Wizard Will's Street Scouts.
- 462 The Born Guide; or, The Sailor Boy Wanderer.
- 468 Neptune Ned, the Boy Coaster.
- 474 Flora; or, Wizard Will's Vagabond Pard.
- 483 Ferrets Afloat; or, Wizard Will's Last Case.
- 487 Nevada Ned, the Revolver Ranger.
- 495 Arizona Joe, the Boy Pard of Texas Jack.
- 497 Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys.
- 503 The Royal Middy; or, The Shark and the Sea Cat.
- 507 The Hunted Midshipman.
- 511 The Outlawed Middy.
- 520 Buckskin Bill, the Comanche Shadow.
- 525 Brothers in Buckskin.
- 530 The Buckskin Bowers.
- 535 The Buckskin Rovers.
- 540 Captain Ku-Klux, the Marauder of the Rio.
- 545 Lieutenant Leo, the Son of Lafitte.
- 550 Laliffe's Legacy; or, The Avenging Son.
- 555 The Creole Corsair.
- 560 Pawnee Bill, the Prairie Shadower.
- 565 Kent Kingdon, the Card King.
- 570 Camille, the Card Queen.
- 575 The Surgeon-Scout Detective.
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- 650 Butterfly Billy, the Pony Rider Detective; or, Buffalo Bill's Boy Pard.
- 656 Butterfly Billy's Man Hunt.
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- 679 The Sea Shadower; or, The Freshwater's Legacy.
- 686 Orlando, the Ocean Free Flag; or, The Tarnished Name.
- 692 The Rival Sharps; or, Redfern, the Secret Service Scout.
- 697 The Scarlet Sombrero; or, The Sharp from Texas.
- 702 Blue Jacket Bill; or, Red Hat Rangers' Red Hot Racket.
- 707 The Red Sombrero Rangers; or, Redfern's Last Trail.
- 713 Carl, the Mad Cowboy; or, The Lariat Queen.
- 719 Pawnee Bill's Pledge; or, The Cowboy Kidnapper.
- 725 Daring Dick, Pawnee Bill's Pard; or, The Red Cavalry Raid.

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- 8 Kansas King; or, The Red Right Hand.
- 19 The Phantom Spy; or, The Pilot of the Prairie.
- 55 Dandy-Eye, the Unknown Scout.
- 68 Border Robin Hood; or, The Prairie Rover.
- 158 Fancy Frank of Colorado; or, The Trapper's Trust.

LATEST AND NEW ISSUES.

- 729 Silverblade, the Half-Blood; or, The Border Beagle at Bay. By Joe E. Badger, Jr.
- 730 Violet Vane's Verdict; or, The Crooked Game at Coffin City. By Wm. G. Patten.
- 731 Ruth Redmond, the Girl Shadower; or, The Rivals in Buckskin. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.
- 732 Daisy Dell, the Pavement Detective; or, Trapping Big Game. By T. C. Harbaugh.
- 733 Toled Tom, the Mad Prospector; or, Unearthing the Cavern League. By Lieut. A. K. Sims.
- 734 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Double Deal; or, The All-Around Surprise. By Edward L. Wheeler.
- 735 Broadway Billy's Business; or, Waking Up Wind Canyon Camp. By T. C. Cowdrick.
- 736 Larry, the Thoroughbred; or, Beaten on Every Side. By George C. Jenks.
- 737 Buck Taylor, the Comanche's Captive; or, Buckskin Sam to the Rescue. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.
- 738 Broadway Billy's Curious Case; or, The Mysterious Disappearance at Manitou Springs. By J. C. Cowdrick.
- 739 Silverblade, the Hostile, or, The Border Beagle's Ghost Trail. By Joe E. Badger, Jr.
- 740 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Deathwatch; or, The Moving Mystery at Mexican Mustang. By Edward L. Wheeler.
- 741 Violet Vane, the Ventriloquist. By Wm. G. Patten.
- 742 Billy Winks, the Bell Boy Detective; or, Breaking the Meshes of the Golden Coil. By T. C. Harbaugh.
- 743 Buck Taylor's Boys; or, The Red Riders of the Rio Grande. By Col. Prentiss Ingraham. Ready October 20.
- 744 Night-Watch Dick, the Life Saver of the Docks. By Joe Pierce. Ready October 2